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THE PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS IN LOCAL SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

by

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ROBERT ARTHUR GRAINGER

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY

OF

ARTHUR GRAINGER

Whose support and encouragement will always be remembered.

ABSTRACT

This was a descriptive study. Its method was qualitative and inductive. The purpose of the study was to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making, factors related to those attitudes, and factors related to parents' propensity to participate. Twenty professional educators from four elementary schools in the Edmonton Public School District and twenty-four parents of children attending those schools participated in the study. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews.

The findings of the study indicate that the current role of parents in schools is perceived by most parents and professional educators to be largely service and support oriented. Parents' opinions are seldom sought prior to important decisions being made and parents are generally denied the opportunity to contribute to decisions in decision areas professional educators define as professional. While professional educators were highly satisfied with the current role of parents in the school, parent respondents were almost evenly divided on that question.

Slightly more than half of the parent respondents supported the concept of sharing decision-making authority with professional educators, while slightly less than half felt that concept to be inappropriate or unnecessary.

However, no parent expressed unqualified support for the concept. Professional educators were generally opposed to sharing decision-making authority with parents at the local school level.

Content analysis of the data revealed that parents' attitudes toward the concept of shared decision-making were related to concerns about the qualifications of parents in general and their ability to represent them, and to their conception of an ideal parent-professional educator relationship which included limits to appropriate participation. Professional educators' attitudes were related to the way in which they defined their own, and parents', role in the school, to their previous experience with parent involvement, and to their high level of satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

Parents varied in their propensity to participate. Their propensity to participate was related to the perceived relationship between their involvement and positive benefits for their children, to the influence of professional educators, to parents' satisfaction with the school, and to such personal factors as the confidence to act, family commitments and interest, and their satisfaction with the current role opportunities in the school.

Professional educators related parents' propensity to participate to their level of concern for the education of their own children, to the influence of professional educators, to parents' satisfaction with the school, and to such personal factors as a parent's confidence to act

and an individual's family and employment commitments.

The study concluded with the development of some theoretical considerations and propositions based on the findings of the study and the review of the literature.

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The appropriate model of public school governance has long been the subject of debate and controversy in western democracies. Across North America, and elsewhere in the western world, the past two decades have seen an upsurge in interest in this question. In concert with a general trend towards a broadening of the base of political authority and decision-making in other areas of public administration (Fredrickson, 1982:353), governments, professional educators, parents, and community members have debated the most appropriate level of centralization of decision-making authority in respect to the operation of public school systems and the extent to which that decision-making authority might properly and efficiently be devolved to the individual school. A related question, of fundamental concern in this study, is the extent to which substantial decision-making authority might be shared between educators and parents at the local school level.

Support for the concept of devolution of decision-making authority to individual schools and some form of shared decision-making between professional educators and parents has been evident in the findings of an array of government commissions and reports since 1970 (Taylor, 1977; Astin, 1979; Schools in Australia, 1973; Worth, 1972). Baron (1981:55) suggests that:

> . . . no major plan for reform during the past two decades has failed to give a place, and sometimes a major place, to decision-making at the school level and the part parents can play in fostering parent involvement in some aspect of it.

While some (Kratzmann, 1982:6) caution that the nature of prevailing social, economic, and political conditions may tend to favor the forces of centralization in educational administration, various forms of single school governance structures, often involving some form or other of shared decision-making between professional educators and lay persons, have recently been adopted in West Germany, England and Wales, Norway, Denmark, France and New Zealand (Bea Hie, 1978:41; Audain, 1982:28; Macbeth, 1981:120). Miles (1982:202) reports that fourteen states in the United States require or recommend the inclusion of parents in local school policy-making, while in Australia recent legislation in several states has mandated a significant role for individual school councils in the administration and operation of public schools.

In Quebec, Canada, legislation is planned which would result in the abolition of district school boards in their current form and the establishment of individual school councils comprising administrators, teachers and parents (Burgess, 1982:12-16). Goble (1982:561-562) argues that the reforms are likely to fuel the debate on the role of parents in local school governance, and that while what eventually transpires may not be immediately transferable to other provinces, the changes:

> . . . will introduce a new element into the Canadian environment, challenging conventional thinking in the other provinces and eventually suggesting the possibility of otherwise unthinkable options.

The significance of the single school in the process of public school governance, and the need for substantive parent involvement in local school policy development was referred to in the Kratzmann Commission (1980) report. It was noted that, for many parents, the size, complexity, and formality of school jurisdictions hindered effective communication and acted as a formidable barrier to parents anxious about the nature and quality of their children's education. Kratzmann et al. (1980:45) observes that:

> . . . parents frequently disagree with the establishment of specific educational policies that are binding on an entire district and argue persuasively for greater control and autonomy for individual schools.

A final recommendation of the Commission (Kratzmann et al. 1980:53) was that:

> . . . school staff, principals and individual teachers, in setting objectives and planning resource deployment and instructional strategies, [should] consult regularly and extensively with local communities and parents.

Discussion related to the adoption of any model of shared decision-making between professional educators and parents gives rise to a number of basic questions. One relates to the attitudes of parents to such reforms. To what extent do parents desire a shared decision-making function in the administration and operation of their children's local school, and how willing are parents to participate in substantive and authoritative school decision-making at the individual school level? A second question relates to the attitudes of professional educators toward any substantive sharing of decision-making authority with parents at the local school level.

Research designed to identify and describe the attitudes of professional educators and parents toward shared decision-making at the local school level, and to gain some insight and understanding of the factors related to those attitudes, is justified in terms of the maintenance and future promotion of positive and productive relations between the two groups. Greater awareness of areas of potential agreement and potential conflict, and some appreciation of their basis, should be of value in the development of a public school educational climate conducive to cooperation, understanding, and mutual support.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was (1) to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making, (2) to identify and describe factors related to those attitudes and parents' propensity to participate, and (3) to identify and describe the nature of any similarities and differences in the responses of parents and professional educators.

The purpose of the study was achieved through research directed at four problem statements. These problems were derived from the review of the literature and the conceptual framework and are presented in Chapter 3.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Contribution to Research and the Literature

There is widespread support in the literature for the view that parents should have a substantive and authoritative role in the educational policy-making process at the local school level (Davies, 1976a; Saranson, 1981; Schweers, 1983).

It is argued that increased parent participation in schools would result in benefits to society as a whole, to schools, and to parents and their children. It is proposed that gains in the quality and acceptability of decisions would result leading to increased overall support for the school (C.E.A., 1981:60; Schweers, 1983:37), that increased levels of childrens' learning flow from parent participation in the school (Connell, 1978:65; Moles, 1982), and that benefits to individual participants include civic self-actualization, greater competency in community affairs and personal satisfaction and growth (Burges, 1977:45; Safran, 1979:96). For many proponents of increased parent participation, however, the argument is essentially a political one. Popkewitz (1979:203) sees much of the argument for community participation in educational decision-making in terms of an ideological commitment to democracy. He believes that individuals should assume responsibility for decision-making in institutions that affect their lives on a day-to-day basis. For Davies (1976b:10), too, the case for citizen participation is based on the democratic ideology. He proposes (1976b:10) that:

> . . . the foremost goal against which participatory activities must be measured is . . . , more self-government for people in their own communities.

An underlying assumption in the call for a more substantial and influential role for parents in the administration and operation of their local school is that such a role is desired by parents in general and that, if given the opportunity, parents would accept the enlarged role. While there are indications that some parents do seek a more substantial and influential role in their children's school (Scout and Borders, 1979; Miles, 1982; Lucas and Lusthaus, 1979), other researchers have reported only a limited parent demand for an enlarged role (Thornbury, 1981; Williams, 1978). Other survey findings (Canadian Education Association, 1979; Gallup, 1981) have suggested substantial public support for greater involvement in the administration of schools, but a lack of clarity concerning the form such involvement should take and a widespread unwillingness to actually become involved.

In fact, little is known concerning the propensity of parents to participate in local school decision-making if given that opportunity, of the circumstances which appear to encourage or discourage that participation, or of the reasons which impinge on individual and group propensity to participate. As Wimpelberg (1981:2) warns:

> Although advocates of greater parental control assume that levels of dissatisfaction with public schools are sufficiently high to warrant major reforms of school governance, our empirical base of knowledge concerning the varieties of preferences parents might exercise is so inadequate that most critics can only speculate on the likely outcomes of reform.

Despite limited research evidence, a consistent argument which alleges professional educator opposition, or at least ambivalence, to increased parent participation in local school decision-making pervades the literature. Principals and teachers are charged with resisting parents' efforts to gain a more influential role in school decision-making (Smith and London, 1981; Brown, 1981; National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1979) and professional associations with exerting disproportionate influence over educational policy-making at all levels of school governance (Divoky, 1979; Buttenweiser, 1981; Retsinas, 1982).

Fantini (1976:18), on the other hand, proposes that:

> . . . while both lay and school persons are unified in their belief in citizen participation, they remain divided as to the means of its implementation.

The limited empirical base constrains the development of a viable implementation strategy for a policy designed to enhance the role of parents in their children's school and constitutes an important deficiency in the current state of knowledge.

This study describes the attitudes of selected parents and professional educators toward the substantive participation of parents in the governance of local elementary schools and the range and nature of any similarities and differences between the attitudes of the two groups. The study also investigates and describes factors which the participants in the study reported are related to those attitudes and parents' propensity to participate, including any differences in factors reported by the two groups. In so doing, this study builds on previous research and contributes information that was not previously available in the literature.

Practical Significance

A major justification for this research is its potential for practical application. A trend towards greater parent participation in local school administration and operation is evident. The inclusion of parents in the local school decision-making process would be a matter of great importance to professional educators and parents alike.

Information resulting in a better understanding of the respective attitudes of both major stakeholder groups, and some appreciation of the factors related to those attitudes, could be of significant practical value in facilitating a more productive and satisfying relationship between parents and professional educators and could constitute the basis for the successful implementation of locally-based cooperative school decision-making structures.

The research data and findings should be of practical value to school and school system administrators in the development of policy and implementation strategies relating to the involvement of parents in the local school decision-making process. Further, the growing number of in-service education seminars and conferences related to school-community relations is indicative of the increasing interest in this subject. The research data and findings should be of practical value to both pre-service and in-service teacher educators concerned with parent-school relations and interactions.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions are included to provide a basis for clarity and understanding of terms used frequently throughout the study.

Parent participation in local school decision-making refers to the formal and legal adoption by a school system of one or other form of structure whereby parents, or elected representatives of parents, share with professional educators decision-making authority with respect to the administration and operation of their local school, including decision-making in such significant areas as budget, personnel and program. While parent participation may be considered one form of parental involvement, it is necessary to distinguish between involvement activities, which are primarily supportive in orientation, and activities in which parents become equal participants with professional educators in decision-making related to policy at the local school level.

Parent involvement refers to the wide range of activities in which parents are often involved in connection with the operation of their local school, excluding any formal decision-making function. Parent involvement may include processes which provide for the regular introduction of the viewpoints of parents into the school through various structures and procedures set up for this purpose, as well as such activities as parent volunteer services, fund-raising and social contact.

While professional educators may be influenced by parents in the course of parents' involvement in the various activities of the school, decision-making authority clearly remains with school personnel.

Highly-involved parent refers to parent respondents who have present or recent past experience in an executive capacity on the formal parent-advisory body in their school. Two of the four schools in the study had formal parent-advisory structures operating in their schools when the study was conducted.

Professional educators refers to the principal and teacher respondents who participated in the study.

Attitude refers to a state of mind and involves an evaluation of someone or something (Reynolds, 1974:3). Mifflen and Mifflen (1982:177) define an attitude as:

> . . . an affective disposition of a person toward a specific object, based on one or more beliefs about that object and influencing the formation of intentions toward that object.

Attitudes are dynamic and are primarily feelings rather than beliefs. Accordingly, attitudes tend to be unstable and subject to change although some attitudes may become entrenched, particularly when resulting from feelings of hurt. Further, as with values, attitudes may be said to characterize individuals or groups (Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982:177).

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND THE EDMONTON CONTEXT

In section 93 of the British North America Act (1867) it was stated that the provincial legislature "may exclusively make laws in relation to education." Subject to provisos concerning the protection of the educational rights of religious minorities and Indians, control of education became a provincial responsibility (Mifflen and Mifflen, 1982:204). However, as Bryce (1980:7) notes, no provision was made in the act with respect to the status of local government in education. As a consequence, "school boards which had been in existence prior to provincial legislatures, became their creature" (Bryce, 1980:7).

Local school boards are constituted under provincial law. Gue (1977:139) notes that "a school board derives its authority only from the legislature of the province in which it is located." The powers of school boards are limited to those specifically delegated by provincial legislation.

In Alberta, a tradition of shared responsibility for the governance of education developed and has been maintained. However, two circumstances seem likely to have, at least, long term consequences for the nature of the relationship between the provincial Department of Education and local school boards. A Canada-wide pattern of consolidation of small school districts into larger units has been maintained. Alberta was the first province to enter upon a general reorganization. Legislation was implemented in 1937 which, according to Gue (1977:132), was passed "despite strong opposition from thousands of trustees in small rural villages and town school boards." In 1935 there were 3734 school districts, often consisting of just one or two schools. Today there are 149 school districts, divisions, and counties in the province, and the trend towards consolidation continues (Alberta Education, 1981-1982).

Consolidation has been accompanied by an increasing provincial contribution towards the cost of education. In 1906 only 12% of the total expenditure on education came from provincial revenues. By 1960 that contribution had increased to 55% (Gue, 1977:131). In 1983-1984, the provincial contribution will be 62% (E.P.S.B.a,1983). While the ratio of provincial to local funds need not necessarily have implications for the control of educational decision-making, it does seem that the traditional role of the school board vis-a-vis the provincial Department of Education could undergo a significant change in the near future.

The Edmonton Public School Board

Established in 1882, the Edmonton Public School Board now represents some 45 000 parents of 66 743 students, and is the legal policy-making body in respect to the operation of the 191 schools in the Edmonton Public School district (E.P.S.B.b, 1983). Nine school trustees are elected to the School Board for three year terms by a city wide electorate.

Prior to October, 1979, the Edmonton Public School Board central office was reorganized on the basis of a one-line authority structure. Under the new organizational structure, six administrative areas, each consisting of between 25 and 35 schools, were established. Each area is under the administrative control of an associate superintendent of schools who in turn is responsible to the district superintendent. Under the new organizational structure each organizational member reports, and is responsible, to only one person. School principals report directly to their respective associate superintendent.

In December. 1978, the Edmonton Public School Board approved an administrative recommendation to implement school-based budgeting. Principals are advised annually of the guidelines for budgeting. Individual school budgets are then prepared by the school principal and submitted to the area associate superintendent before going to the School Board for approval.

A draft policy submitted to the School Board for approval in June, 1983 (E.P.S.B.c, 1983) stated that the Board believes that "the education of students is best served through the cooperative efforts of student, parents, school personnel and community members." Further, (E.P.S.B.c, 1983):

> Parents should be active participants in their child's education by demonstrating interest in and support for school activities, and by being informed about their role in the education of children.

In accordance with this belief the Board (E.P.S.B.c, 1983) is "committed to the concept that meaningful and appropriate involvement of parents and community members is desirable in public schooling." There is, however, no legislative provision for the inclusion of parents in the school decision-making process. School Board policy "encourages principals to facilitate the establishment of organizational structures for meaningful community participation in the school's decision-making process" (E.P.S.B.d, 1983). Indeed, "where community interest is evident, the principal is expected to encourage and facilitate such a structure" (E.P.S.B.c, 1983). However, that policy also stresses the advisory nature of any such structure or mechanism and the final authority of the principal. The policy (E.P.S.B.d, 1983) states that "the implementation of any committee recommendations and suggestions remains at the discretion of the principal." Nor are staff members permitted to participate in such a group without the prior approval of the principal.

Further, in respect to any local school-parent structures, principals are expected (E.P.S.B.c, 1983) to:

> Clearly communicate the role of the committee and the ultimate responsibility of the principal for the operation of the school and all related activities.

The extent and nature of opportunities for parents to participate in the local school decision-making process are not fixed and vary widely. While some school principals have established quite formal advisory structures, in other schools there may be little or no opportunity for formal input.

In summary, it can be said that there is no recent tradition of formal parent participation in decision-making related to their local school in the Edmonton Public School district, the general context in which the study is set. Any participation of parents is through the district school board structure. Nor is there an indication that school board policy embraces the possibility of other than an advisory function for parents at the individual school level in the immediate future.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter the related literature is reviewed to establish a background perspective for the study and the conceptual framework for the study is developed.

The objective of the review of the literature is to bring together existing knowledge related to the question of parent and professional educator attitudes toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making, to assess its significance, to identify inadequacies and deficiencies in the existing knowledge base, and to justify the selection of the research problems of the study.

This was a descriptive study of the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and of the factors related to those attitudes and parents' propensity to participate. It was, therefore, considered necessary to undertake a review of the literature that: (1) examined existing concepts of participation, (2) reviewed current knowledge in relation to individual propensity to participate and factors related to participation, and, (3) reviewed current knowledge more specific to participation in the school context.

Therefore the review is delimited to the following major topics:

1. The concept of citizen participation,
2. Factors related to the propensity to participate, and
3. Participation in the school context.

THE CONCEPT OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Research over the past 25 years has shown citizen participation to be a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Citizen participation means different things to different people and, as Rosener (1978:109) notes, "different things to the same people, depending on the issue, its timing and the political setting in which it takes place." Nie and Verba (1977:328) focus on the more narrow concept of political participation defined as "those legal activities by private citizens which are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take." Goel and Smith (1980:76) adopt a broader position and suggest that political participation "comprises all those activities that, in one way or another, are intended to affect the workings of, and outcomes in, the political system."

Traditionally conceptualized as unidimensional in nature, with the main dimension being the extent of an individual's activity in the political process (Lane, 1959; Milbrath, 1965; Van Loon, 1970), later research (Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978; Milbrath and Goel, 1977) confirmed that citizen participation is more accurately conceptualized in multidimensional terms.

Distinctions can be made between individuals in terms of level of activity, intensity of activity and level of political awareness as well as in terms of the mode of activities in which individuals engage. Wandersman (1981:44) argues that distinctions need also be made between quantitative and qualitative definitions of participation. He defines four types of individual participation on a continuum of levels of activity and penetration of power and decision-making: non-participants; members, who attend meetings, comment and vote; workers, who join committees and do the work; and leaders, who define goals and choose the tasks. This distinction built upon the important contribution of Arnstein (1969:216-224) who proposed a ladder of participation (see Figure 2.0) based on dimensions of power, ranging from the manipulation of participants at the bottom, and culminating with citizen control.

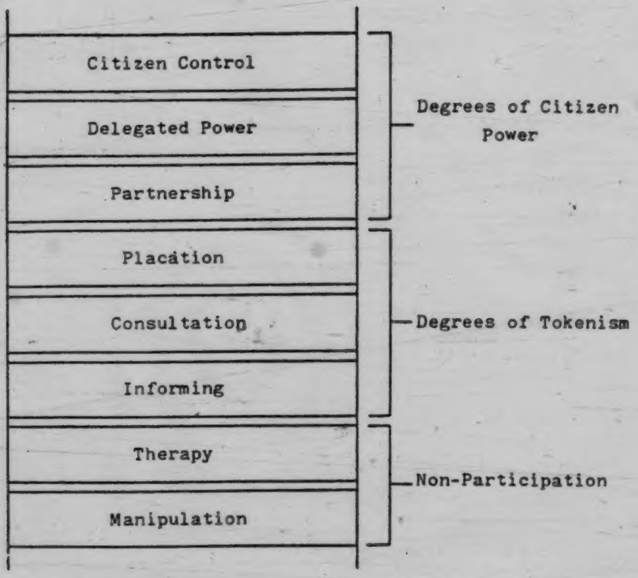
Citizen Control
Delegated Power
Partnership
Placation
Consultation
Informing
Therapy
Manipulation
Degrees of Citizen Power
Degrees of Tokenism
Non-Participation

Figure 2.0.

Ladder of Participation. Arnstein (1969:216-224).

For Arnstein (1969:216), citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. She argues that participation without power is an empty process.

Warren (1977:226-240) is concerned with basic motives for participation when he distinguishes between citizen involvement and citizen action. Warren (1977:226) defines citizen involvement as:

> . . . the orderly, channeled introduction of the viewpoints of citizen participants into an organization through appropriate structures and processes set up for this purpose.

According to Warren (1977:226) citizen involvement is essentially supportive and favorable in orientation. Involvement is designed to accommodate the views of participants without challenging the viability of the organization. The general purposes, policies, and procedures of the organization are seldom at issue nor are the technology or professional rationale under question. Citizen action, in contrast, refers to activities which give priority to the felt needs and wishes of the participants in a manner which reduces the continued viability of the organization to a secondary consideration. A similar distinction is drawn by Steinberg (1977:iii) who defines participation as an activity undertaken specifically to exercise power or influence, to have an impact on decision-making, compared with involvement where there is no such intent.

Dimensions of power, or inclusion in the formal decision-making process at the point of decision, form the basis for most classifications related to parent-school interaction. Kaplan and Tune (1978:15) propose a five level classification shown in Figure 2.1. Each level varies in intensity and impact. The five levels are presented as an hierarchy, greater impact being achieved at the apex of the pyramid.

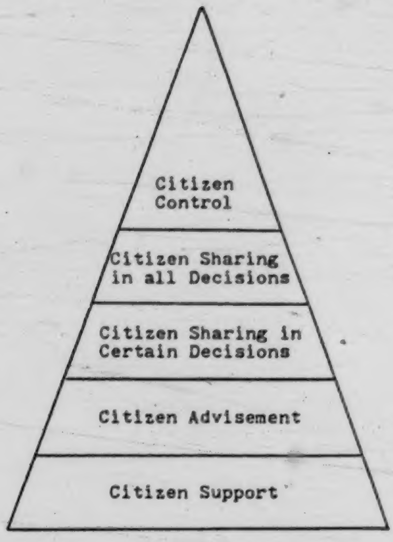
Citizen Control
Citizen Sharing in all Decisions
Citizen Sharing in Certain Decisions
Citizen Advisement
Citizen Support

Figure 2.1.

Levels of Citizen Involvement. Kaplan and Tune (1978:15).

Fantini (1980) developed a continuum of parent-school relations shown in Figure 2.2. Fantini classified participants as "clients" on one end and "consumer-governors" on the other end, with some participants assuming "producer" and "consumer" roles. As clients, parent input is not valued, and is confined to traditional parent-teacher association activities, parent-teacher meetings and invitations to scheduled school events. Producer-related participation results when parents assist school personnel in a host of school-initiated volunteer programs. More direct participation is evident when parents participate in consumer-related activities, activities which recognize parents as intelligent, informed consumers whose views and opinions are seen to contribute to the solving of problems in the school and community.

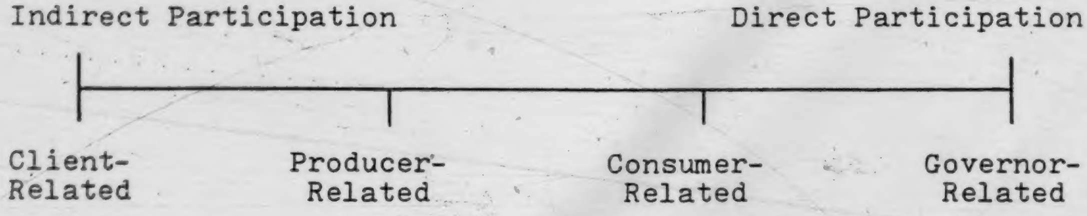
Indirect Participation
Direct Participation
Client-Related
Producer-Related
Consumer-Related
Governor-Related

Figure 2.2.

Continuum of Participation. Fantini (1980).

The most direct participation occurs in governor-related activities which involve the adoption of an active and sometimes authoritative function by parents in the development of school policies (Fantini, 1980).

Licata (1982:103) proposed a five level classification of types of community input into a school policy-development process, shown in Figure 2.3.

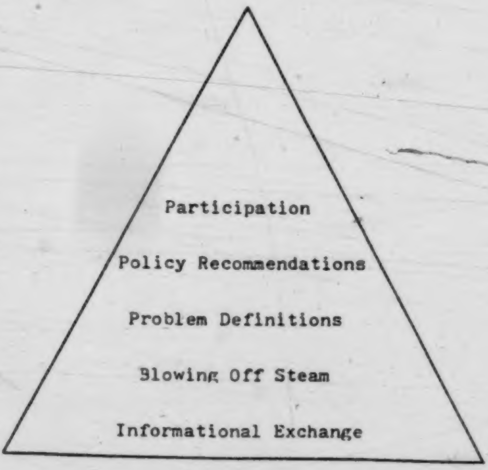
Participation
Policy Recommendations
Problem Definitions
Blowing Off Steam
Informational Exchange

Figure 2.3.

Levels of Community Input. Licata (1982:101-109).

The classification is conceptualized as a continuum ranging from a relatively low degree of input, such as through question-answer meetings, to a relatively high degree of input, such as citizen membership on a school governance or policy-making body. Again the levels are presented hierarchically suggesting that those activities closer to the apex involve higher degrees of actual participation than those at the lower levels.

Participation, then, is a multidimensional phenomenon. Individuals vary in the intensity of their participation, in the type of participatory activity in which they engage and in the mode of participation adopted. Individuals vary in their motive for participation and modes of participation vary in respect to their impact upon participants and upon the organization or institution with which participants are involved.

In addition, as Salisbury (1980:12) notes, participation tends to be dynamic in its operation. Participation "occurs in a time dimension and for a given citizen its character and meaning are likely to change over time" (Salisbury,1980:12). As circumstances and situations change, as individuals acquire new skills, interests, ideas and information, it can be expected that individual patterns of participation will vary as a consequence.

Finally, participation appears to be institution-specific in its application. Salisbury (1975:33) believes that:

> . . . thinking about participation and investigating its properties must be done in terms of specific organizations and institutions, and commonalities across their boundaries must be established empirically, not assumed.

In fact, while opportunities for individuals to actively participate in a democratic society are numerous and varied, levels of participation are low. Nie and Verba (1977:334) note that a widely accepted finding on political activity is that only a small minority is active beyond the act of voting. Mischler (1979:33) reports that in the Canadian context, while most citizens vote, "the evidence suggests very few Canadians have ever participated extensively in any aspect of the political process other than voting." Further, as Smith and Macauley (1980:84) emphasize, interest and involvement in political life is not evenly distributed throughout any society. Individuals vary in their propensity to participate in the political system of which they are a part, prompting the need to consider who participates and why, and under what circumstances active participation is most likely to occur.

FACTORS RELATED TO THE PROPENSITY TO PARTICIPATE

Influences Upon Citizen Participation

Political scientists and sociologists have attempted to explain existing patterns and distribution of citizen participation in terms of a variety of interrelated social-demographic, psychological and contextual factors.

Mischler (1979:65) contends that citizens become active when they want to participate and possess sufficient ability to do so, and that where "motivation exceeds resistance posed by limitations or opportunity, citizens participate." Wandersman (1981:39) suggests that an individual's resources are likely to influence individual desire and willingness to participate and the affect of that participation. He categorizes the necessary resources as skill resources, the skills a person has in terms of areas of expertise and relevance of prior experiences; and discretionary resources which represent the cost of participation, and include time and money. It is argued by Wandersman (1981:39) that individual resources are limited and individuals will make decisions related to the allocation of resources on the basis of a range of judgments concerning, for example, the likelihood of a successful or pleasurable experience, individual preference or instrumental value.

Social-demographic factors. Several social-demographic factors seem to be related to individual propensity to participate.

1. Social class identification. Social class identification has consistently been shown to influence an individual's propensity to participate. Individuals occupying lower social status in society participate in political and community activities at a significantly lower rate than do higher status individuals (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978:2-10; Lipset, 1981:114-116; Welch, 1975:553-559;

Campbell, 1979:222). Dawson (1980:96-97) suggests differences in political attitudes begin to emerge as early as third or fourth grade. Middle class parents seem to foster an earlier development of the cognitive and planning skills and feelings of self-confidence and efficacy that have been shown independently to be important for effective political action.

Related to social class identification is individual social status. Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978:22-45) reported that individual status in a community has a positive effect upon the nature of citizen participation and that the size of the effect increases as social status increases. Giles and Dantico (1982:149) note the advantages enjoyed by high status individuals.

> Not only do their greater personal resources, for example higher education and income, enhance their participation and power, but their participation is further enhanced by residence in higher status contexts where they interact with others of similar status.

2. Level of education. The level of an individual's education has been shown to be a strong predictor of level of political and community participation. Research over twenty years and in a number of different countries has demonstrated that the better educated tend to have a greater sense of duty, have greater confidence in their ability to influence decision-makers, are generally more interested in political and community issues and are likely to be more active in the more demanding modes of participation (Key, 1961:323-331; Almond and Verba,

1963:380-387; Goel, 1980:113; Campbell, 1979:225). Dawson and Prewitt (1977:167-168) add that highly educated citizens are more accustomed to collective decision-making and are active in the organizational life of society, thereby acquiring habits and skills easily transferred to political activities.

In the Canadian context, Mischler (1979:97) warns that the relationship is clearer in respect to certain forms of participation. Mischler (1979:97) concludes that it is the high school graduate who is most convinced of the value of the more intense forms of participation, and that the more highly educated, while accepting the democratic creed, are more cynical about the effectiveness of participation in collective activities compared to direct contact.

3. Occupation and level of income. Goel (1980:114) reports that it is almost universally true that the more prosperous individuals are more likely to participate in conventional political activities than the less prosperous. Income differences are also related to social status and attitudinal differences. Goel (1980:114) notes, also, that the more affluent are likely to be better educated, interact with others in social and political groups and be more exposed to the mass media.

Occupational characteristics have been found to be related to both level of education and income as well as introducing some independent affects in promoting or discouraging political involvement because of prestige levels or other reasons (Goel, 1980:115). Lipset (1981:205) argues that some occupations limit actual leisure-time and psychic leisure-time free of anxieties that can be devoted to non-personal issues. Lipset (1981:205) suggests that:

> . . . the low participation of the very poor is partly attributable to the struggle for existence which leaves no energy for "investment" in political activity, the result of which is, in any case, dubious.

4. Sex and age. Data collected over many years illustrates that men are more active participants than are women (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978:234; Goel, 1980:117; Lipset, 1981:206) although, as Lipset (1981:206) notes, this is less the case in respect to middle and upper class women who are generally better educated, have fewer children and thus have more opportunity to become active participants than do lower status women. Tedin et al. (1977:448-456) report that changes have become evident in the nature and level of female participation in accordance with the changing role of women in society in the last decade, although the gap between men and women remains.

Citizen participation seems also to be related to age. Goel (1980:117) notes that many studies across the world have reported findings that suggest participation increases steadily with age until it peaks in the middle years and then declines in old age. Mischler (1979:102) has confirmed the existence of a similar pattern in the Canadian context.

5. Level of organizational involvement. The level of involvement in non-political, voluntary organizations has

been shown to be an important predictor of individual participation in political activity (Steinberg, 1977:15; McPherson, 1981:706; Almond and Verba, 1963:309; Lipset, 1981:201-202). Further, as Goel (1980:120) emphasizes, the affects of participation in non-political associations is likely to be cumulative. Individuals participating in one type of voluntary association are also likely to be more active in other forms of political activity. However, such membership is low and unevenly distributed. According to Lipset (1981:201), for every country for which we have data, over half the adult population belongs to no formal organization apart from a trade union, and individuals of high social status are more likely to belong to those groups than are their lower status peers.

Psychological factors. Psychological involvement refers to an individual's awareness of, interest in, and commitment to the political system and community affairs. Mischler (1979:67) defines psychological involvement as a:

> . . . broad gauge determinant of political behavior, distinguishing participants from non-participants generally, and participants in activities requiring a high degree of initiative and intensity from those active in less demanding forms.

Individual levels of psychological involvement seem to be influenced by certain attitudinal factors. The most thoroughly investigated is political efficacy.

1. Political efficacy. Campbell et al. (1954:187) define political efficacy as:

> . . . the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties. It is the feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change.

Campbell (1979:96) notes that efficacy does not necessarily lead to active participation. Rather, it refers to the feeling that participation, if initiated, would be likely to have some affect. Political efficacy appears to be both a major incentive to, and a consistent predictor of, levels and intensity of political participation (Van Loon and Whittington, 1981:147; Landes, 1983:369; Goel, 1980:127).

2. Duty of citizenship. Almond and Powell (1978:37) suggest that an individual's belief in an obligation to be politically active as an element of good citizenship may also constitute motivation for some kinds of participation, although Goel (1980:126) found that sense of duty attitudes relate strongly to social position variables, especially higher education.

In the Canadian context, Mischler (1979:37) has found that while sense of duty is a reliable predictor of voting participation, the relationship does not necessarily apply in the case of more intense forms of participation.

The opportunity to participate. In addition to the range of social, demographic, and psychological factors which have been shown to influence individual propensity to participate in the political system and community affairs, it would appear that an individual's perception of the extent of opportunities to participate constitutes an additional influence (Steinberg, 1977:14; Almond and Powell, 1978:37).

Almond and Powell (1978:37) stress the importance of available structures that facilitate involvement. They see "a continuous interaction between propensity to act and available roles for political activity." Van Loon and Whittington (1981:140) propose a similar link. They suggest that individuals are more likely to participate if existing institutions provide structures and encouragement to do so. Mischler (1979:75) notes that participation seems to require that opportunities exist or are seen to exist, and that these are believed to provide a reasonable likelihood of success.

Participation and Organizational Theory

Styskal (1980:926) notes that a basic proposition of the "participation thesis" is that individuals uniformly desire greater involvement in the organizational decision-making process. It seems more likely that individuals differ in respect to their desire and willingness to participate in organizational decision-making (Allutto and Belasco, 1972, 1973; Tannenbaum, 1974; Styskal, 1980) and, rather, that propensity to participate will depend upon the particular situation and circumstance. Organizational theorists have focused on two major factors related to propensity to participate.

The nature of the problem. A number of theorists (Simon, 1977; Miner, 1978; Wickstrom, 1979) distinguish between problems which might be classified as routine and repetitive in nature, which are best dealt with by means of an established procedure and which do not generally elicit strong participatory interest on the part of members, and problems which are more novel, unstructured or unusually consequential for members or for the organization. Individual desire and willingness to participate in the decision-making process is likely to be greater in the case of the latter problem type.

Downs (1967:168) uses the useful notion of "depth of change" in classifying organizational decisions. Minor changes in an organization's everyday behavior can be made with little interest in participation in those decisions likely to be generated by members. As the depth of change increases members might be expected to be more interested and willing to contribute. Mohrman et al. (1978:14) suggest that using a systems theory, organizations can be conceived of as consisting of multiple sub-systems, each commonly characterized by an identifiable functional domain, and each with a set of decisional areas relevant to it (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Parsons, 1960). Mohrman et al. (1978:15) propose that the participation of organizational members in decision-making may be more, or less, appropriate depending on the sub-system from which the decisional situation emanated.

It is possible to extend that line of argument and propose that individual propensity to participate and attitudes toward participation are likely to be related to the nature and saliency of the decisional area involved.

The individual participants. Individuals differ in the extent to which they desire to participate in organizational decision-making.

The concept of a zone of acceptance, or indifference, originated with the work of Simon (1957:12) and Barnard (1960:168). The concept is of a range of decisional accountability which exists within an individual in relation to the directives of superiors. Barnard (1960:168) proposed that on the basis of an individual's zone of indifference, directives will be unquestionably accepted, unquestionably unacceptable or marginally acceptable or unacceptable. Individual propensity to participate will be influenced accordingly. Bridges (1967) used the concept in an educational context and argued that to involve organizational members in decisions which fall within their individual zone of acceptance is ineffectual and likely to be dysfunctional. According to Bridges (1967:51), desire to participate and willingness to do so will be limited to issues clearly outside individual zones of acceptance, based on criteria of relevance and expertise. Relevance relates to the personal stake an individual has in the decision, expertise relates to an individual's perception that he has the knowledge and ability to make a meaningful contribution to the decision. Owens (1981:316) adds the criterion of jurisdiction. Participation, according to Owens, should be limited to decision areas in which members have a clear authority to act.

Individual propensity to participate, and attitudes toward participation, are likely to vary according to an individual's perception of the consequences or personal relevance of the issue to himself or the organization, according to his perception that a worthwhile contribution can be made and according to the degree of freedom organizational leaders are granted in decision-making by individual organizational members.

Summary: The Concept of Participation and Related Factors

It is evident that citizen participation in its broadest sense is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Defined as an activity undertaken to have an impact upon the operation of the political system, the various modes of citizen participation can be classified in terms of dimensions of power or influence upon the system. It has been shown that individual participation in political and community affairs is minimal in extent and unequal in distribution. The limited extent of participation seems not to be spread randomly across the social system but, rather, systematic differences in the nature, rate and mode of participation seem to apply.

Individual propensity to participate is related to some pattern of interaction between a variety of social, economic, psychological and contextual variables and the perceived existence of appropriate opportunities for participation. Further, it would appear that participation is both dynamic in nature and institution-specific in its application.

Organizational theory suggests that individual propensity to participate in decision-making is likely to be related to an individual's perception of the consequence or personal relevance of the decision to himself or the organization and a belief that he possesses sufficient knowledge and ability to make a worthwhile contribution to the decision. The concept of an individual zone of acceptance, an area within which individuals are prepared to accept the decisions of superiors, is an important one.

The discussion to this point has identified a variety of factors which have been shown to be related to an individual's propensity to participate in political and community affairs in general. It is now appropriate to focus upon the school context in considering factors which appear to influence parents in terms of their desire and willingness to become involved in the operation of their local school and participate in decision-making related to its operation.

PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Taylor (1976:20) notes that "greater involvement by parents in the education of their children is now part of the official doctrine of many governments and education authorities." However, despite widespread attempts to promote greater parent involvement and participation in the operation of public schools, in general, only limited success has been reported. While the literature related to factors which are considered to influence parents' propensity to become more involved, or participate, in the operation of schools is plentiful, much of this is based on the opinions of the authors. Empirical data related to why parents do not become involved are limited.

Who Becomes Involved and Why?

A comprehensive study of involvement in the public schools was conducted by Salisbury (1980).

Interviews were conducted with over 500 parent-teacher association members and office-holders, school board candidates, and citizen committee members from six school districts in St. Louis. Follow-up questionnaires were completed by 168 of the original respondents three years later.

The respondents, the large majority of whom were described by Salisbury (1980:15) as moderately involved in their schools, did exhibit some general characteristics. All respondents were parents, often of large families, 71.6% were mothers and almost half were aged 31-40 years. Respondents were highly educated, 94% completing Grade Twelve or higher, and 81% were engaged in professional-technical, business managerial or clerical-sales occupations. In addition 96.8% were married and 94% owned their own homes.

It was significant that in describing the kind of individual who did not participate in community affairs, respondents focused more on such factors as an individual's general attitudes towards their children and their community and to a lesser extent on such situational factors as time or home circumstances or such social-psychological considerations as shyness, and largely ignored social characteristics. As Salisbury (1980:61) emphasizes, the participants themselves specified attitudes toward participation in particular, and social responsibility more broadly, when they sought to identify who participate.

Salisbury (1980:79-95) reported that while the initial impetus for involvement can almost always be traced to reported concerns for, and interest in, their children it is possible to categorize participants in terms of the initial stimulus and later patterns of activity as either "supportive" or "purposive" in orientation. By far the largest proportion of parents report becoming active in their school either as a natural consequence of having their children enter school or after prompting by friends, neighbors or a teacher. This group tends to be highly supportive of their school and to confine their activity to child-centred roles designed to maintain the existing educational status quo. A minority of parents, who tend to be more highly educated and often less satisfied with the existing educational arrangements, are stimulated into higher levels of activity by a perceived need to act on particular issues. Their activity becomes purposive in orientation.

Salisbury (1980:129) found, therefore, that participants tended to fall into two identifiable groups, those that work primarily within the school in the traditional volunteer and supportive roles and those whose activities become more policy-centred in orientation.

Personal Life Pressures

The day-to-day demands of pressure of work and daily life have been reported to constrain parents in their ability, desire, and willingness to adopt more active roles in the operation of their local schools. Pettit (1978:34), in a study of parents who live in inner-suburban areas in Melbourne, Australia, found that when both parents work, or when families include young children, parents felt their availability to be severely limited. As one parent observed (Pettit, 1978:34):

> . . . by the time I've got home, cooked the meal and washed up, it's eight o'clock and all I want to do is sit and watch the telly before I go to bed.

Cohen (1978:440) argues, too, that given most parents work or have other time consuming commitments, in concert with the high geographic mobility and the growing diversity of personal interests and activities of adults, only limited commitment from parents can be expected.

The Influence of Professional Educators

Fernandez (1980:16) believes that many parents are deterred from greater school involvement and participation by a deep-seated fear of being put-down by professional educators, as a consequence of negative experiences at school themselves or as a parent, and as a result of a trained reverence towards professional authority, all of which constrain parents in their relations with professional educators.

Related to the above is Cohen's (1978:439) belief in the existence of a "modern cult of professionalism and distrust of non-certified authority." Cohen sees societal trust in, and reliance upon, the formally trained professional as substantial and widespread, adding that "trained professionals increasingly appear to be the chief source of authority in matters secular or spiritual." Davies et al. (1978:31) also refer to an "undercurrent of deference to persons of achieved status." Musgrave (1978:26) in his study of parents of inner-city school children in Melbourne, Australia, found that, by and large, education was seen by those parents to be the preserve of the professional, and that parents reported a felt lack of competence to participate in a meaningful way in decisions they regarded as complicated. However, parents in the Musgrave study were likely to be from lower social status and less educated groups, and quite different findings might apply in the case of parents representative of the more educated, higher social status groups.

Nature of the Role

While some parents may be deterred from greater involvement, or participation, by a feeling of inferiority to professional educators, a commonly recurring theme in the literature concerns a belief that a more serious deterrent is the limited and often trivial role that is offered to parents. Taylor (1976:16) notes that people soon become sensitive to paternally-imposed, ritualistic participation:

> . . . whether in the form of the works council agenda that never includes the important items, the rigged meeting of the parent-teacher association, the consultative committee that limits itself to trivia, the school council that is persuaded to concentrate on coach trips rather than curriculum.

Davies (1981:92) argues that parents participate because they care, and want to have a say in significant issues. Too often participation is limited to an agenda imposed by professionals or government agencies. According to Davies (1981:93):

> Triviality of content and lack of results explain the limited enthusiasm on the part of large numbers of citizens to devote time and resources to the process.

Traditional advisory councils and parent-teacher associations have been widely criticised as tokenistic and manipulative, seldom offering meaningful opportunities for substantive participation in school decision-making

(Davies, 1980; Andrews, 1980). Fernandez (1980:20) asserts that:

> . . . the traditional parent-school association is outmoded and meaningless for parents who want to spend their time and energy on an activity that will affect the quality of their child's school experience.

It is a fact that parent-teacher association membership in the United States declined by half in the period 1968-1978 (Davies, 1978:12). However, the extent to which this decline is actually indicative of widespread parent dissatisfaction with the role granted to such organizations is not known.

The Type of School

Lucas and Lusthaus (1978:211) note the existence of a long-standing assumption of differences between the extent and quality of parent involvement at the elementary and secondary levels. Parents are perceived to lose interest in involvement as their children progress through school. While there is some indication that parents are more involved when their children attend elementary school (Salisbury, 1980) there is a paucity of research evidence related to any differences in their desire to participate. Lucas and Lusthaus (1976) reported that high schools were perceived to be less open than elementary schools. However, the same researchers (Lucas and Lusthaus, 1978) found no differences between the parents of elementary and high school students in their desire to participate overall or in thirteen of fourteen specific decisional areas.

Dawang et al. (1978) found that parents of high school students were slightly less interested in participation in personnel selection and evaluation than were parents of elementary school students. However, this is only one of many potential areas of decision-making. Further, an equal proportion of parents from both types of schools perceived themselves to be involved in their children's school.

Satisfaction with the School

There is some indication that parents' propensity to become involved and participate in the operation of schools may be related to overall parental satisfaction with the school. Salisbury (1980:194) found that most active parents were generally satisfied with the quality of the educational experiences offered to their children. Salisbury (1980:194) believes that while parents were satisfied "citizen participation cannot be expected to bring about profound changes in the nature of schooling." Scout and Borders (1979) were able to categorize the uninvolved parents of high school students in North Carolina in their study as complacent. Their confidence level in the school was strong and they indicated only a mild interest in becoming more actively involved. The overall level of confidence in the school of already-involved parents was lower than the non-involved group, but significantly higher in respect to specific areas in which they were directly involved. While the sample included a disproportionate number of female and college educated parents, the results support the possibility of some relationship between parents' propensity to become active and their relationship with the school.

Overall satisfaction with the school is central to Boyd's (1976:551) concept of a margin or zone of tolerance, that "area of manoeuverability granted, or yielded, to the leadership of schools by a community." Boyd posits that professionals are free to run the school system according to their professional desires and beliefs until such time as their actions conflict with values which are important to a community, in which case they face the likelihood of controversy and opposition. Boyd (1976:551) contends that for pragmatic political reasons school administrators usually seek to avoid conflict, and strive to meet community expectations, thereby reducing the necessity and likelihood of widespread community demand for involvement.

It is apparent, then, that there may be certain factors which act to influence parents in respect to their propensity to become involved, and participate, in the operation of their local school. The attitudes parents hold towards parental participation in local school governance, and the extent to which parents might seek, or willingly accept, a more authoritative role will now be considered.

Attitudes Toward Public Schools and Parent Participation

The view that public dissatisfaction with public schooling has increased sharply across North America and elsewhere in the western world in the last decade is widely reported in the literature (Seeley, 1982; McGraw, 1982; Griffiths, 1982; Shanker, 1983). The National Committee for Citizens in Education (1979) asserted that:

> . . . the crisis of confidence, of disenchantment, and frustration by a sizeable segment of the nation's population with public schools is such that the public schools are indeed at a crossroad and their survival is in doubt.

This alleged widespread and growing dissatisfaction is sometimes referred to as an important stimulus to increased parent participation in their local schools. An editorial in a Phi Delta Kappan (1982) issue devoted entirely to the "New Right" criticism of public schools suggested that the most important reason for the substantial growth in the number and popularity of alternative schools is their provision for meaningful, local control of the school.

In fact, recent evidence relating to the attitude of the public, especially of parents of public school students, is limited and equivocal.

Gallup (1983:35) reported that the percentage of adults who indicated high levels of satisfaction with public schools has declined consistently since 1974 to 31% in the 1983 Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools. A similar pattern has been true for parents of children attending public schools.

The result of representative interview surveys conducted in Ontario by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1978, 1981) suggested that only a bare majority of the public were satisfied with the public school system in general, while nearly one-third reported being dissatisfied. However, in both surveys those respondents most remote from the school system were the least satisfied, while those with children in public elementary schools were the most satisfied. Moreover, a 1979 Canadian Education Association survey of public opinion in Canada about public involvement in educational decisions revealed that of the 764 parents surveyed 63% rated public schools highly (C.E.A., 1979) and an annual poll of parents conducted by the Edmonton Public School Board since 1980 has consistently returned high levels of satisfaction with the local school and the school system in general (E.P.S.B.e, 1983).

Parents of children attending a public school have consistently rated public schools higher than do other community members. These parents also rate their children's school more highly than public schools in general (Gallup, 1983; OISE, 1981; Watson, 1982). This is an important finding in relation to parents' propensity to participate.

The limited information available indicates broadly-based satisfaction with, and support for, public schooling, especially in the case of parents of children attending a public school. At the same time, there also exists a significant and possibly growing proportion of parents who are presently dissatisfied with at least certain aspects of the public schools. Whether that dissatisfaction is manifested in growing demands for a more authoritative role for parents in public school governance is quite unclear. Indeed, recent evidence related to the attitudes of parents towards their participation in local school governance is also limited and equivocal. While parents apparently do not seek total control of schools (Hightower, 1978; Silk, 1978; Etheridge, 1978; Davies, et al. 1978) there are some indications that parents would welcome a more authoritative role, at least certain parents and under certain conditions (Dawang, 1978; Scout and Borders, 1979; Lucas and Lusthaus, 1978; OISE, 1981). Other researchers (Williams, 1978; Musgrave, 1978; Pettit, 1978; Thornbury, 1976; Jackson and Stretch, 1976) have come to a quite different conclusion implying that important limits exist to the extent to which parents seek, or would willingly take up, substantive involvement in local school decision-making. A survey of 4 200 school-board members across the United States resulted in the identification of parents' lack of interest as their major concern (Underwood et al. 1983:22-26).

Alden (1975) reported the findings of a study in which 600 persons in 27 school districts in Chicago were interviewed on the question of citizen participation in public education. While 70% of the respondents reported too little parental involvement in schools, support for parent participation was minimal. Alden (1975) was prompted to suggest that "public policy has misinterpreted or misdirected the interests and/or energies of parents and volunteers." Williams (1978) reported a similar finding.

In a questionnaire survey in which the views of over 2 000 families in Western Australia were solicited, scarcely any parents sought less opportunity for involvement, but only a small minority sought or advocated substantive participation in school policies and administration.

In other instances, responses which may indicate a belief in the need for a more authoritative role for parents have been accompanied by an apparent unwillingness to undertake such a role. The Canadian Education Association survey of public attitudes towards public involvement in educational decision-making (C.E.A., 1979) revealed that, for the Prairie provinces, 57% of respondents reported too little say in the way schools were run, yet over 60% were apparently unwilling to serve on either a School Board advisory committee or a Home and School Association committee. Similarly, in discussing the results of the Thirteenth Annual Gallup Poll of The Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools, Gallup (1981:34) reported a finding consistent with the Canadian Education Association survey. Although an important minority of parents reported that they should have more influence in the determination of school policies, general satisfaction was indicated in relation to specific policy areas.

In discussing the apparent inconsistencies, the authors of the Canadian Education Association survey (1979:58) noted that claims for a right to a greater say does not necessarily mean a willingness to become involved. It might also be an indication that parents desire access to what they see as a more appropriate means of communicating their views and concerns than is presently available. Isherwood et al. (1981:7) suggest that more participation may be sought on an issue basis rather than as a permanent member of a formal body. There might also be an important difference in the attitudes of parents who were offered an authoritative decision-making function in the school, a role fundamentally different from the advisory role parents have traditionally been offered.

From the limited information available it might be inferred that the majority of parents are generally satisfied with the public school system and with the role they currently play in its operation and governance. However, a significant group of parents are apparently less satisfied and desirous of a more influential role at the local school level. Further, it is possible that a substantial segment of parents may find the existing school board structure unresponsive to their needs and views (Isherwood et al. 1981:7; Kratzmann, et al. (1980:45)and seek some alternative means to those currently available for communicating their feelings and concerns.

The successful development and implementation of alternative means of parent-school communication, including the adoption of any fundamental change in the relationship between professional educators and parents would rely substantially upon the attitude of professional educators.

In considering the question of parent participation in the administration of local schools, the attitude of professional educators becomes of utmost importance.

Professional Educator Attitudes Toward Parent Participation

The proposition that professional educators are generally opposed to substantive parent participation in local school governance and constitute the most important barrier to greater parent participation is widely supported (Gittell, 1977; Thomas, 1978; Smith and London, 1980). Brown (1981:370) suggests that:

> . . . perhaps the most powerful opposition to increased school-community linkage has been the schools. Schools are educational bureaucracies and tend to resist the sharing of power.

Lightfoot (1978:37) argues that teachers tend to be defensive about their professional status and their occupational image, are threatened by outside people, especially those of higher occupational and educational status, and:

> . . . wish to form coalitions only with parents who are obsequious, appreciative and uncritical or accepting of their needs for autonomy.

In addition, the substantial increase in the strength of teacher associations in the 1960s and 1970s, and the resultant establishment of the principle of collective bargaining, is commonly identified as a further limiting factor to greater parent participation in local school decision-making (Divoky, 1979; Buttenweiser, 1981; Schachter, 1980-81).

Retsinas (1982:32) notes that the range of negotiated items now includes such important areas of educational policy as curriculum, text books, reporting systems, discipline codes, and class size, thereby effectively blocking parent entry to substantive areas of educational policy.

The potential for professional educator opposition and obstruction to increased parent participation in key areas of educational decision-making is addressed in the literature. Baron (1981:18) notes that the reluctance of professional educators to share decision-making authority in matters of intimate professional concern such as curriculum, teaching methods, school organization and pupil assessment procedures is hardly surprising:

> . . . since it implies that his knowledge and skill is so unremarkable that it can be commented upon and appraised by others who do not share either his training or his experience.

Wickstrom (1979:1) argues that recent trends relative to the governance of education -- lay control, the professionalization of teachers and the resurgence of the notion that the local school should be a focal point for community identification, can be in conflict with each other. Wickstrom (1979:2) notes that:

> We should not be surprised, then, when the practical realities of initiating greater involvement include increased conflict, tension and concern.

In fact, the evidence related to professional educator attitudes towards greater parental participation in local school governance is limited.

Thornbury (1981), whose study was confined to the secondary school context in the United States, reported that principals and teachers expressed a stronger desire for parents' participation in decision-making related to the development, implementation and evaluation of school programs and policy than did the parent respondents themselves. It was also reported, however, (Thornbury, 1981:150) that principals sought more parent participation in decision-making than teachers did and that both professional educator groups expressed a stronger desire for greater parent involvement as supporters and volunteers than for their participation in decision-making. Harriet and Ornstein (1976) surveyed 399 urban school superintendents and concluded that they were much more positive about community participation, defined as input involving advice on school policy, than about community control, defined as determining school policy. Further, of the four areas of decision investigated -- curriculum, student affairs, school finance and personnel, support for community participation in school finance was most highly supported, while advice in respect to personnel matters was least desired.

There are indications that teachers value their participation in decision-making in some areas more than in others. Bridges (1967) reported that teachers had a greater desire for participation in decision-making related to the performance of professional aspects of their role than in respect to managerial or administrative areas. Similar findings were reported by Mohrman et al. (1978) who found that teachers valued, and derived greater satisfaction from, their involvement in what they perceived as the professional aspect of their role than in decisions of a managerial or an administrative nature. Both these studies were conducted within the context of the debate over a greater decision-making role for teachers vis-a-vis administrators. It might well be that teachers would adopt a different position in respect to the sharing of any decision-making authority with parents.

Despite the paucity of recent evidence it does seem reasonable to expect that professional educators would oppose a substantial degree of parent participation in local school decision-making, particularly in connection with decision areas intimately related to the performance of their professional role. One basis for the expected opposition from professional educators to greater lay participation in local school decision-making stems from organizational theory relating to the professional in organizations.

Teachers as Professionals

Organizational theorists (Scott, 1981:223; Mintzberg, 1979:348-349) propose that professionals require, demand, and are granted, considerable discretion and autonomy in the definition and performance of their role in an organization.

Mintzberg (1979:348) classifies a school as a professional bureaucracy, an organization which relies on the skills and knowledge of its operating professionals in order to function. Mintzberg (1979:348) proposes that the professional bureaucracy relies for coordination on the standardization of skills, training and indoctrination. "It hires duly trained and indoctrinated specialists -- professionals -- for the operating core and then gives them considerable control over their own work."(Mintzberg, 1979:349). Despite standardization considerable discretion always remains in the application of skills. In the professional bureaucracy some uncertainty always remains and must be contained. Mintzberg (1979:353) emphasizes that the "containment of this uncertainty is one of the reasons why the professional requires considerable discretion in his work." Professional bureaucracies are highly decentralized; a great deal of power over the operating work rests with the professional staff. Not only do professionals seek to control their own work, they also seek collective control of administrative decisions that affect them (Mintzberg, 1979:358).

The extent to which educators might properly be classified as professionals is the subject of an on-going debate. Hasenfeld (1983:163) classifies education as a "semi-profession," one that is characterized by either a lack of a systematic theoretical base, a lack of monopoly over the field of practice or fragmented professional associations. Meyer and Rowan (1978:90) argue that teachers themselves tend not to believe in the "myth of professionalism" and downgrade the importance of training and special skills in the performance of their role. Conversely, as Cox and Wood (1980-81:1) note, teachers are demanding a changed role, and greater autonomy in the performance of their role. In this respect, Angora and Williams (1981:14) assert that "teachers are trained professionals whose background and high level of competence have led them to expect a relatively broad degree of autonomy in their work."

In a sense, whether educators should or should not be classified as professionals might be seen as irrelevant. Whatever the merits of that argument, as Willower (1982:93) points out:

> . . . problems are more likely to arise in connection with organizational changes when they add to an already heavy teacher workload, when they erode teacher status relative to that of students, when they seriously cut back current levels of teacher autonomy, when they disturb routines that control teacher-pupil relations and order teachers' in-school environment . . .

Increased parent participation in the governance of local schools can realistically be expected to have the potential to do all of those things.

It would appear that professional educator opposition, or at least ambivalence, to increased parent participation in local school decision-making may be expected, especially in respect to decision areas central to the day-to-day performance of teacher and school administrator roles. However, the extent to which professional educators actually oppose greater parent participation in their local school, the nature and basis for that opposition, and factors which might be related to their existing attitude remain unclear.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study, participation is conceptualized as being multidimensional in nature. As illustrated in Figure 2.4, individual parent participation in their local school is likely to vary according to individual differences in desire to participate, in the mode of participation preferred and in the intensity, or level of activity, with which that participation is pursued.

These dimensions of participation can be thought of as continua. Participation is considered to be dynamic in character and an individual's position on each of the continua may be subject to change over time or as a consequence of changed circumstances.

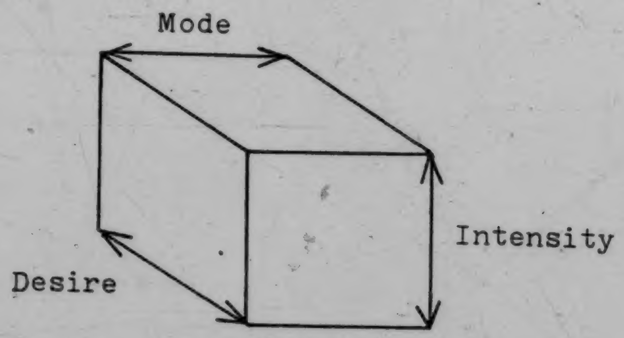

Figure 2.4.

Dimensions of Participation.

Individual attitudes towards participation, and individual propensity to participate, are likely to be related to a range of factors. These factors, which are summarized in Table 2.0, may be classified as: (1) individual attributes, (2) school characteristics, and (3) structural arrangements. Individual attributes consist of a range of social, demographic and psychological characteristics that have been shown to be related to individual propensity to participate in political activities and community affairs (Goel, 1980). These include social class identification, level of education and income, occupation and sex, as well as individual feelings of political efficacy and sense of duty or citizenship.

Table 2.0

Factors Related to Propensity to Participate

Individual Attributes	School Characteristics	Structural Arrangements
Social class identification	Size	Structures
Level of education	Type	Procedures
Level of income	Attitude of professionals toward parent participation	Nature of role
Occupation		
Sex		
Political efficacy		
Sense of duty		

School characteristics include the type of school, its size, and the attitude of the principal and staff towards parent participation in the operation of the school. Structural arrangements relate to the nature of the opportunities available to the parents to participate. This would include the existence or not of any clearly established structures or procedures for participation, and the nature of the role offered to parent participants, including the particular decisional areas in which participation is available.

Decisional areas in an organization are likely to have different degrees of saliency for organizational members. Propensity to participate and the particular attitude of parents and professional educators toward parent participation are likely to vary according to the saliency of the decision area involved -- personal, professional or managerial/administrative.

An individual's zone of tolerance refers to the area of latitude an individual parent grants school personnel in respect to decisions related to the operation and management of their child's school. In general, while school personnel act in a manner that does not consistently clash with parents' individual views, beliefs and values, those parents are likely to experience general satisfaction with the school and their desire and willingness to participate in the school decision-making process is likely to diminish.

Parental propensity to participate in school decision-making can, therefore, be conceptualized as a function of the clarity and extent of that parent's zone of tolerance, and the nature of a parent's relationship with the school is likely to vary accordingly. The relationship between the zone of tolerance and the nature of a parent's likely relationship with the school is summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Parent-School Relationships: A Typology

Individual Zone of Tolerance	Level of Satisfaction	Propensity to Participate	Nature of Participation
Broadly defined	High	Low	Not involved or sporadic-supportive.
	High	High	Supportive
Narrowly defined	High	Low	Not involved or sporadic-supportive.
	High	High	Ultra supportive
	Low	High	Purposive

Individual zones of tolerance are likely to vary in extent and clarity of definition. Individuals with a broadly defined zone of tolerance are likely to experience a high level of satisfaction with the school and to have a high level of confidence and trust in professional educators. These individuals are likely to lack strong views concerning the most appropriate educational experiences for their child and to rely largely on the discretion of professional educators in this regard. These individuals are likely to either not become involved in the activities of the school in anything more than a sporadic or ceremonial way, or will tend to confine their activities in the school to those of a supportive orientation.

Individual parents with more narrowly defined zones of tolerance are likely to fall into two broad categories.

Some parents will find their narrowly defined views and beliefs very much in accord with the existing philosophy of the school. In this situation, high levels of satisfaction will be experienced. These parents are also likely to either avoid active involvement or, alternatively, to become actively involved possibly in an ultra-supportive way, but again confining their involvement to activities with a supportive orientation.

Other individuals, also with clearly defined views, may find that the limits of their zone of tolerance are exceeded more often by the actions of school personnel. This situation may result in a personal decision not to become involved or perhaps an avoidance strategy, such as transferring children to an alternative school, might be adopted. Conversely, these individuals may feel a more intense need to intervene directly in the school decision-making process and seek to extend the scope of their participation to include an active, shared decision-making role; their participation becoming more purposive in orientation.

The individual zone of tolerance is dynamic in nature. Its clarity and extent is likely to be subject to change over time and as a consequence of changing circumstances. Factors related to individual propensity to participate, and the process resulting in a decision to participate, are depicted in Figure 2.5. A parent's decision to participate in the operation of his or her local school can, therefore, be conceptualized as the result of the combined and interactive influence of a variety of personal attributes, school characteristics and existing structural arrangements. Individuals are likely to participate when the boundaries of their zone of tolerance are transgressed in a way that seriously challenges that individual's basic views, beliefs and values. In the final analysis, however, the act of participation may depend upon the existence of appropriate structures or procedures to permit that participation to occur. Having made a decision to participate, the existence of appropriate and legitimate structures or procedures facilitates that participation. While the absence of such structures and procedures need not prevent participation, it becomes more difficult in these circumstances.

THE STATE OF THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

This review of the literature and research has revealed that the theory related to individual and group participation in a democratic society is not well developed. While it is evident that participation should be conceptualized in multidimensional terms, the concept of

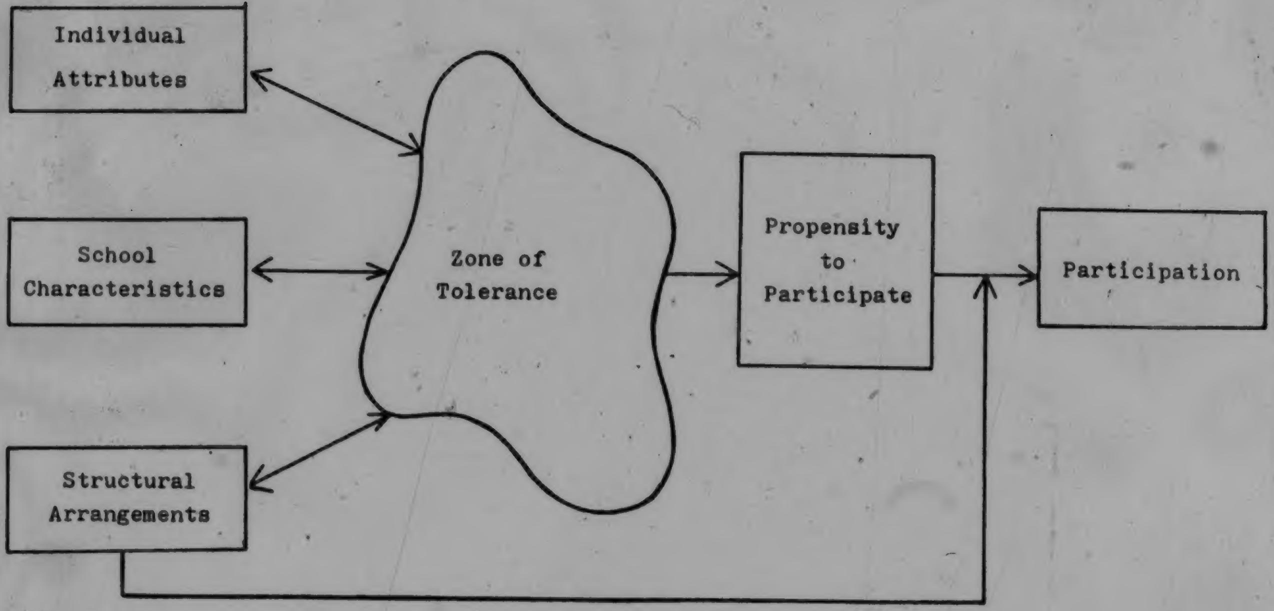
Individual Attributes
School Characteristics
Structural Arrangements
Zone of Tolerance
Propensity to Participate
Participation

Figure 2.5.

The Decision to Participate

citizen participation is itself not clearly defined. Definitions of citizen participation are numerous and varied and theorists have identified a wide variety of individual and group behaviors as participation. Confusion remains in respect to any distinction between citizen involvement and citizen participation. Some theorists use the term synonymously. Others distinguish between them but the bases for that distinction often differ.

While there has been a considerable amount of research over the past 20 years relating to citizen participation in general, and individual and group participation in the electoral process in particular, it is evident that the existing state of knowledge concerning participation in the local school context is more limited. Survey research into individual and group propensity to participate in the political system and community affairs in general has resulted in the identification of a range of social, demographic and psychological factors which appear to be related to individual decisions to participate. However, citizen participation may be institution-specific in its application, and the extent to which these more general factors apply in the specific school context is unclear. The existing state of knowledge concerning parents' propensity to participate in local school decision-making is limited. Little is known about parent attitudes toward such participation, of their desire to participate and under what circumstances, or of factors which seem to be related to those attitudes.

The literature and empirical data related to organizational members' propensity to participate in organizational decision-making is considerable, and the general attitude of teachers towards their own participation in school decision-making has been investigated. However, there appears to be a gap in knowledge related to the attitudes of professional educators toward the participation of parents in the local school decision-making process and a gap, also, in knowledge and understanding of factors which may be related to those attitudes.

There is a need for research that will add to the existing state of knowledge related to:

1. the attitude of parents towards their participation in local school governance and factors related to those attitudes and propensity to participate, and

2. the attitude of professional educators towards the participation of parents in the local school governance process and factors related to those attitudes and parents' propensity to participate.

SUMMARY

In this chapter a review of the literature was presented in relation to (1) the concept of citizen participation, (2) factors related to the propensity to participate, and (3) participation in the school context, and a conceptual framework for the study was developed.

The first section of the review examined the concept of participation in the political system and community affairs. Participation is conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon. Individuals vary in terms of level and intensity of activity, levels of political awareness and interest and mode of activity preferred (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978). It was found that a wide variety of individual and group behaviors have been termed participation and that the various modes of participation are often distinguished in terms of dimensions of power or impact upon the organization or individual concerned. A distinction is often drawn between concepts of involvement, considered to be essentially supportive in orientation, and participation, which implies access to the decision-making process at the point of decision. Participation is considered to be dynamic in its operation and institution-specific in its application (Salisbury, 1980).

Factors related to the propensity to participate were reviewed under the following major headings: influences upon citizen participation in the political system and participation and organizational theory. It was found that survey research over the past 25 years has resulted in the identification of a range of social, demographic, psychological and contextual variables which appear to be related to individual and group propensity to participate in the political system and community affairs.

Participation rates were shown to be low and not to be spread randomly across the social system. Rather, systematic differences in the nature, rate, and mode of participation seem to apply.

Organization theory suggests the importance of the nature of the problem, an individual's perception of the consequence or personal relevance of the decision to himself or the organization, and the capacity of that individual to make a worthwhile contribution in an individual's desire and willingness to participate in organizational decision-making. The concept of a zone of indifference or acceptance (Barnard, 1960; Simon, 1957; Bridges, 1967) was found to be of particular value in the development of the conceptual framework for the study.

The third major section of this chapter focused on participation in the school context. The literature was reviewed under the following major headings: influences on parental propensity to participate, attitudes toward the public schools and parent participation, and professional educator attitudes toward parent participation.

It was found that a number of factors may be related to parents' propensity to participate in the operation of the school. These include, in addition to the social-demographic factors referred to above, the influence of professional educators, the nature of the role offered and the level of parent satisfaction with the school. However, the existing knowledge base was found to be quite limited in respect to these factors and further research is needed to more clearly identify and describe these factors.

The knowledge base related to parent and professional educator attitudes toward the role of parents in local school decision-making was found to be limited and equivocal. While most parents seem generally satisfied with the public school their children attend and do not actively pursue a more authoritative role in the school, there are some indications that a substantive and possibly growing proportion of parents are less satisfied with the schools and seek the opportunity to participate in their operation. A review of the literature related to the attitudes of professional educators has led to the identification of this group as a primary potential source of opposition to greater parent participation. However, the empirical evidence available to support such a contention is limited. There is a need for more research to more clearly identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators towards the participation of parents in local school decision-making.

In the fourth section of the chapter a conceptual framework for the study was developed which proposes a model to describe the interaction of variables related to individual parent propensity to participate in their local school. The framework is based upon a multidimensional concept of participation and incorporates the proposed influence of factors and concepts identified in the review of the literature.

The concluding section of the chapter is a statement of the inadequacies and deficiencies in the current knowledge and understanding about parents' propensity to participate in their local school and parent and professional educator attitudes toward participation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter consists of three major sections: (1) research design, (2) research methodology, and (3) the validity of the study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Nature of the Study

Given that no general theory on public involvement has as yet been formulated (C.E.A., 1981:31) and that the knowledge base relating to the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward parent participation in local school decision-making is still limited, an inductive approach, whereby theory is generated rather then verified and hypotheses and concepts emerge from the research data itself (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), was adopted. This was a descriptive study. Hartman and Hedblom (1979:82) suggest that descriptive studies are appropriate when there is a lack of definitive theory in respect to the phenomenon, event or interaction being investigated, and propose three assumptions underlying descriptive research:

1. There is a paucity of definitive work in the area of study.

2. Additional description and understanding in the area of study are required.

3. Description logically precedes classification, relationships prediction and explanation in the scientific method. Description, therefore, is a necessary and logical preliminary step in any science. According to Best (1977:116) a descriptive study describes and interprets. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on or trends that are developing.

Research Problems

The major purpose of the study was achieved through research directed at the investigation of four research problems and related sub-problems. The research problems and sub-problems were derived from the review of the literature and the conceptual framework of the study.

Research problem 1: the nature of the existing role.

The first problem related to the perception of parents and professional educators concerning the current role of parents in local school decision-making, to the means which both groups saw as currently available to parents to participate, and to the level of satisfaction reported by both parents and professional educators with the existing arrangements. Therefore, the following problem was investigated:

> What is the nature of the current role of parents in local school decision-making and how is this role assessed by parents and professional educators?

In seeking to answer problem 1, the following sub-problems were investigated:

> 1.1. Is parent opinion sought concerning important issues related to the operation of the school?
>
> 1.2. On which type of issues is parent opinion most, and least, likely to be sought by school personnel?
>
> 1.3. What means do parents currently have to communicate their views and opinions to school personnel, and how do parents and professional educators assess these means?
>
> 1.4. How do parents and professional educators assess the extent of parent influence in school decisions?

Research problem 2: satisfaction with the existing role. The second problem concerned parent and professional educator satisfaction with the nature and extent of the current role of parents in their children's school. The objective of the problem was to identify and describe the level of satisfaction with parents' current opportunities for participation in the school decision-making process and to assess the extent to which parents or professional educators seek more or less parent participation in particular decision areas. Parent and professional educator satisfaction with the current level of parents' influence in the school was also addressed. Therefore, the following problem was investigated:

> How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

In seeking to answer problem 2, the following sub-problems were investigated:

> 2.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making in particular decision areas?
>
> 2.2. To what extent have parents been denied the opportunity to participate in specific issues in which they would have sought participation?
>
> 2.3. How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

Research problem 3: attitudes toward participation in decision-making and factors related to those attitudes. The object of the third research problem was to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and to identify and describe factors reported to be related to those attitudes. Therefore, the following problem was investigated:

> What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and what factors are related to those attitudes?

In seeking to answer problem 3, the following sub-problems were investigated:

> 3.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making?
>
> 3.2. What factors are related to parent and professional educator attitudes toward parent participation in local school decision-making?

Research problem 4: factors related to parents' propensity to participate in decision-making. The fourth research problem concerned factors which parents and professional educators report are related to parents' propensity to participate in their local school. Therefore the following problem was investigated:

> What factors are related to the propensity of parents to participate in local school decision-making?

In seeking to answer problem 4, the following sub-problems were investigated:

> 4.1. What factors influence parents in their decision to seek to participate, or not participate, in their local school?
>
> 4.2. What types of issues do parents and professional educators report generate high parent desire to participate in local school decision-making?

The Development of the Sample

Some considerations. Several considerations impinged on decisions concerning the selection of respondents to the study. One related to the viability and the suitability of the research topic in the Edmonton public school context. A second related to the objective of the study to provide as complete a description of the attitudes of respondents to the study problems as possible and to the most appropriate means of achieving that objective.

A preliminary study was conducted by the researcher in order to investigate those issues. The preliminary study consisted of broad-ranging, unstructured interviews on the subject of parent participation in local school decision-making with three elementary school principals, three elementary school teachers and five parents of elementary school children. More detailed description of the study context is included in the first chapter of the study. In summary, however, it can be said that most parents of children attending elementary school in the Edmonton Public School district and professional educators employed in those schools have a limited background in either the practice or the concept of parent participation in local school decision-making.

In discussion with the respondents to the preliminary study it became clear that, while the subject of parent participation in individual school decision-making is seldom discussed by parents or professional educators in the Edmonton Public School district, once raised it is a subject that generates considerable interest and debate. Both groups of respondents seemed to welcome the opportunity to express views on the subject and did so with enthusiasm and thought. An impression was gained by the researcher that the area of study was worthy of research and that the findings could be of value to school and school system administrators in their future relations with parents. As a result of the preliminary study, and after discussion with the researcher's supervisor and dissertation committee members it was decided that a more accurate and complete understanding of the attitudes of respondents towards the study problems would be possible in an intensive study of a small sample of respondents than would be likely using a large sample, questionnaire survey.

A further consideration related to the characteristics of the parents to be selected as respondents. It was decided by the researcher that the sample should be as homogeneous as possible in terms of it's socio-economic characteristics. Research findings over the past 25 years have consistently demonstrated that individuals who have access to higher levels of economic and social resources will tend to participate in political and community affairs at a higher rate and at levels of greater intensity than is likely in the case of individuals who have less of those same resources (Landes, 1983:368). Van Loon and Whittington (1981:140) note that this general finding applies throughout the western democracies including Canada. By attempting to limit differences between parent respondents due to social and economic resources, and by selecting respondents with access to a considerable level of those resources, the intent of the researcher was to develop a sample of parents who might be expected to have a high propensity to participate in their local school and at the same time to control as far as possible for the influence of social and economic factors in any differences between the respondents that might be identified. The objective of the researcher was to attempt to gain a greater understanding and insight into factors related to parents' propensity to participate apart from fundamental social and economic ones.

It was decided that an appropriate first step in the development of a suitable sample would be the selection of four elementary schools situated in residential areas that could be described as suburban, consisting largely of detached single-family dwellings and which, by reputation, were not classified as distinctly disadvantaged. The initial selection was completed in consultation with four associate superintendents of the Edmonton Public School Board, a group of principals of elementary schools in the Edmonton Public School district and a group of Edmonton residents on the basis of the criteria referred to above. Two additional criteria guided the selection of the schools from which the parents and professional educator respondents were to be drawn. In order to study the possible influence of experience on an advisory council on the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward parent participation, it was decided that two of the four schools selected should have a formal advisory structure which had been in operation for at least two years and the other two schools should not have a formal advisory structure. In fact, most elementary schools in the Edmonton Public School district report having one or another form of advisory structure. Usually, however, these operate on an informal basis.

It was also decided that two schools should have a relatively low student enrolment and two should have a medium to high enrolment, a school with a formal advisory structure coming into each size category.

The respondents. Four elementary schools situated in the Edmonton Public School district were nominated from which the respondents to the study were selected. Two of the schools had an enrolment of approximately 550 children, and two had an enrolment of approximately 200 children. Two of the schools had a formal advisory structure involving parents which had been in operation for at least two years.

The parent sample consisted of six parents from each of the four schools. In the two schools with a formal advisory structure, three of the six parents from each school were selected randomly from lists of past and current office-holders of the advisory council. The remaining parents were selected randomly by the researcher from lists of parents of children attending the school.

The professional educator sample consisted of the principal and four members of staff from each of the four selected schools. The staff members were selected randomly after indicating a willingness to participate. All of the professional educator respondents had been at their current school for at least two years.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Permission to Conduct the Research

Permission to conduct the study was obtained through the Division of Field Services, the University of Alberta and from the Edmonton Public School Board.

After permission was granted, the researcher visited the principal of each of the four selected schools to explain the purpose, objectives, and basic research strategy of the proposed study and then invited each principal to participate in the study as a professional educator respondent and give approval to the researcher to seek the support and involvement of staff members in the proposed study. Approval was also sought to solicit the involvement of a group of parents of children from each school as parent respondents. Approval was granted by all four principals. All agreed also to participate in the study. After discussion with the respective school staffs, their support and willingness to participate was also gained on the understanding that anonymity and confidentiality would apply.

Selected parents were visited in their homes by the researcher. During these visits the purpose, objectives, and required commitment on the part of respondents were outlined and any questions or comments dealt with. All parents invited to participate agreed to do so.

Individual appointments for interviews with all professional educators and parent respondents at times convenient to all parties were made for the period of April and early May, 1983.

The Research Strategy

This was a descriptive study in an area of limited theory base and a paucity of recent research evidence. The study had a qualitative orientation in that it sought to achieve as complete a description and understanding of the area of study as possible and has adopted an inductive approach in seeking to generate theory rather than test existing theory. According to Filstead (1979:37), to the qualitatively-inclined researcher, the actual words of respondents are considered to be critical to the process of conveying the meaning systems of the participants which eventually become the results or findings of the research. In deciding upon a method of data collection the basic purposes and goals of the study were considered paramount.

The methodology adopted in a study should reflect the goals and purposes of the research rather than conform blindly to a particular orthodoxy. As Lerner (1959:259) notes, rather than become involved in unproductive dispute over the "best" method, researchers should:

> . . . examine dispassionately the advantages and disadvantages of every established technique in terms of the relevant situation and the specific questions that are being asked.

Douglas (1976:3) also stresses the importance of matching the method with the particular study in question. Douglas (1976:3) urges that:

> . . . the researcher must always begin . . . , with an idea of the kind of data he wants [his research goal], what the situation allows and what his practical constraints are.

If there is reason to believe that one particular research strategy is more likely to facilitate the achievement of the goals of the study than are alternate methods, this is the method that should be adopted (Douglas, 1976:8; Philliber et al., 1980:93).

In view of the basic purpose and objectives of the study it was decided to adopt intensive, semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection for the study.

The Interview as a Research Strategy

The interview is a conversation with a purpose, specifically the purpose of information getting (Cannell and Kahn, 1968:530). Williamson et al. (1977:168) stress that the ultimate value of an interview depends on the commitment or intensity of interest of both parties, on the ability of both parties to understand the true intent of the other's actions and statements, on the extent to which the course or context of the interview may be adapted to meet the needs of either party, and on the way in which the two parties interpret the content of the interview.

Interviews are commonly categorized in terms of their structure or degree of standardization; the questions, their wording and their sequence defining the extent to which an interview is structured. Nachmias and Nachmias (1976:52) believe that the less structured interview is most appropriate if the researcher has limited knowledge about the setting to be studied, or is interested in accounts of interpersonal activities, events or information that could potentially yield a wide range of responses. Kidder (1981:187) emphasizes that not only does the less-structured interview permit the subject's definition of the interviewing situation to receive full and detailed expression, it should also elicit the personal and social contexts of beliefs and feelings. Guba (1980:10) argues that:

> Some elements of the design can always be specified in advance and the wise inquirer will specify all such elements as he can while retaining a flexible posture that permits changes and emendations as the situation may dictate.

An intensive, semi-structured interview format was adopted for the study. A semi-structured interview format ensured that the basic purpose of the interview was achieved and that interviews proceeded in a systematic way. An interview guide was developed for parents and professional educator respondents and used in all interviews. However, the sequence of questions was considered to be flexible and was varied according to the particular responses and reactions of respondents. In order that new and relevant lines of inquiry could be pursued and capitalized upon if, and when, they arose, a variety of supplementary questions were asked of respondents, each tailored to the unique experiences and perspectives of the individuals concerned.

Williamson et al. (1977:166) encapsulated the basic principles adopted by the researcher in describing the intensive interview as a format that:

> . . . is usually flexible, with the types and order of questions, the setting, and even the manner of the interview being governed not only by the study objectives and the cumulative information flow, but also by a continuing assessment of what it will take to make the interviewee maximally responsive.
>
> While some standardized questions may be asked of every respondent, the interviewer takes account of the respondent's individuality in deciding what to ask as well as when and how to ask it.

It has been suggested that the success of an intensive interview will depend upon the nature of the relationship that is developed between the interviewer and the interviewee (Eckhardt and Erman, 1977:222; Phillips, 1971:113), upon the ability and knowledge of the interviewer (Williamson et al., 1977:165; Black and Champion, 1976:360), upon the extent to which interviewer bias intrudes in the interview situation (Eckhardt and Erman, 1977:222; Williamson et al., 1977:189) and upon the degree of correspondence between such characteristics of the interviewer and interviewee as race, sex, age, manner of dress and manner of speech.

In the conduct of the study, the researcher attempted to abide by the principles of effective interviewing. It should also be noted that there is a close correspondence between the characteristics of the respondents and the researcher in relation to such socio-economic characteristics as level of education, nature of employment, age and social status. In addition, the researcher is the parent of children in elementary and junior high schools and has been involved in parent-school relations in the course of his employment for many years.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with 44 respondents. Each interview was of approximately one hour's duration.

In recognition of the widespread belief that interviewee perception of the interviewer is an important factor in the way the interviewees respond in the face-to-face interview situation (Phillips, 1971:113, Eckhardt and

and Erman, 1977:222) care was taken to do all possible to ensure positive, friendly and trusting relations had been established between the researcher and each interviewee prior to the conduct of the interviews.

The parent interviews. In the case of parent respondents, all parents were visited in their homes by the researcher. In all cases the researcher was invited in and often enjoyed coffee with the individual parents during the course of the discussion that followed.

The purpose of these visits was twofold. The first was to outline the nature of the study, to describe its objectives and to explain the extent of the individual commitment required of participants in the hope that an agreement to participate would result. The second important purpose of the home visit was an attempt to establish rapport between the researcher and individual parent respondents leading to the development of a relaxed, confident and secure feeling on the part of each parent concerning the proposed interview. Such a climate was important for two reasons. One relates to the lack of background of most parents in the theory and practice of parent participation in local schools. Many parents expressed the feeling during the course of this initial meeting that they had little to offer in the way of views or opinions on the subject, that they lacked the necessary knowledge or experience to make a worthwhile contribution. During the course of the discussion it invariably became evident that such was not the case. This seemed to give many parents more confidence toward the proposed interview as well as helping to establish a warm and friendly relationship between them and the researcher. Secondly, a number of parents indicated some apprehension about expressing opinions on a subject they felt to be a sensitive one; about offering opinions which they felt could be interpreted as a criticism of their local school principal and staff. The development of a rapport between the researcher and individual respondents therefore assumed a particular importance.

The series of home visits prior to the conduct of the interviews, which were conducted up to one week later, was a time-consuming but necessary procedure which it is hoped contributed in a significant way to the quality and trustworthiness of the data collected.

The interviews with parents were all conducted in the homes of the individuals concerned at a time convenient to them. Often this was during the day, but in a number of instances the interviews took place quite late at night after the chores of the day had been completed and the children were in bed for the night. The interviews were invariably conducted in a quiet, relaxed and unhurried atmosphere. All parent interviews were completed by mid-May, 1983.

Professional educator interviews. Professional educator respondents were contacted by the researcher prior to arrangements being made for the interview. The establishment of friendly and trusting relationships between the researcher and individual professional respondents was again considered to be of the utmost importance.

While most staff members in all four schools agreed to participate in the study if selected, there was a certain reticence and reservation evident on the part of the professional educators as a group that was not apparent in the case of the parents. Several factors may have contributed to this fact. One relates simply to the demands of the day which are such as to constrain teachers in their capacity to accede to requests for assistance. There are high demands made on teachers' time in the day and the opportunities to indulge in additional time-consuming activities are limited. A second factor relates to the first. It concerns the number and frequency of requests for assistance in research projects made of teachers and school administrators in the Edmonton Public School district. The opinion was expressed that the rate of requests is such that it is becoming more difficult to satisfy. The third possible explanation for the slight reservation about participating in this study was the fact that the general area of the study is one which professional educators consider to be a sensitive one. That is hardly surprising. The ramifications of increased parent participation in local schools for professionals are considerable.

All interviews with professional educators were conducted in the confines of the school, generally in an administrator's office or withdrawal room, where the necessary privacy and quietness could be guaranteed. Most interviews were conducted after school hours, although some were conducted during the day in non-teaching periods. Due to the high level of cooperation of the four principals concerned, the interviews were able to proceed in a relaxed and unhurried way.

All professional educator interviews were completed by the end of April, 1983.

The conduct of the interviews. All interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the individual respondents. With the individual approval of participants all interviews were recorded in their entirety. Respondents appeared to be unconcerned about the use of a tape-recorder. The tape-recorder was placed in an inconspicuous position and the impression was gained that its presence did not inhibit respondents in any way. As a consequence of interview appointments being made up to one week in advance, respondents were well-organized, personally prepared and able to devote their full attention to the interview. Interuptions were minimal and this contributed to the flow and continuity of the interviews. As far as possible the interview format was one of conversation rather than formal meeting.

An interview guide, prepared in advance by the researcher, was used to provide a basic direction and structure for the interviews. The questions included on the interview guide were asked of all respondents except for those pertaining only to respondents who were, or had been, active members of their school advisory council. Basically the same words were used in framing the questions. In the event that respondents' lack of comprehension of questions became evident, questions were reframed and elaborated upon as deemed necessary.

In accordance with the goal of the study to achieve as complete a portrayal of the area of study as possible, the researcher attempted, through the use of probing and supplementary questioning, to induce responses which were reflective of the unique individual experiences of respondents. In recognition of the well-recognized danger of interviewer bias and non-verbal cues influencing the nature of individual responses (Smith, 1981:183; Black and Champion, 1976:371), a deliberate attempt was made by the researcher to adopt a neutral and non-directive, and yet interested, involved, and supportive stance in the conduct of the interviews.

At the conclusion of each interview time was taken to converse with respondents concerning the interview and to convey appreciation for their assistance. It can truly be said that the topic of discussion generated considerable interest among most of the parents and professional educator respondents. On numerous occasions post-interview discussions went on for long periods, often over coffee, in the homes of parent respondents and in the staff-rooms of the teacher respondents.

Data Analysis and the Presentation of Findings

Data analysis. In order that the data available for analysis be as complete and accurate a record of respondents' actual comments and language as possible, all interviews were tape-recorded. A separate tape was used for each interview and this was numbered at the completion of the interview. All interviews were then transcribed in their entirety. This procedure was adopted for two reasons. The first related to the method of analysis to be used to analyse the data, which required that the data be available in typed form. The second was a conviction on the part of the researcher that a more complete and accurate analysis of the data could be achieved if the interviews were available for perusal in a typed form, with the actual tapes of the interviews available at all times during the analysis for the purpose of verification and clarification.

In analyzing the data the procedure recommended by Bogden and Biklen (1982) was adopted as a basic guide although the suggestion of others were also taken into account (Spradley, 1980; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Turner, 1981).

According to Bogden and Biklen (1982:145), qualitative data analysis is a procedure whereby data are systematically searched and arranged to enable the researcher to gain a greater understanding of its contents and meaning and to enable the presentation of what is discovered to others. Bogden and Biklen (1982:145) suggest that:

> Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others.

The basic procedure used in the analysis of data was a form of content analysis. Holsti (1968:601) defines content analysis as:

> . . . any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specific characteristics of messages.

For Eckhardt and Erman (1977:298) the process involves the coding, tabulating and analyzing of existing data. Eckhardt and Erman (1977:298) stress that the code should be constructed so that the categories closely approximate the meaning contained in the original communication. Categories, according to Holsti (1968:95), should reflect the purposes of the researcher and be exhaustive, mutually exclusive and independent. Bailey (1982:315) also stresses that the categories be adequate for the purposes of the study. Bailey (1982:315) notes that:

> . . . categories for content analysis are generally not derived from theory or constructed out of thin air, but are constructed by examining the documents to be studied and ascertaining what common elements they contain . . . . Categories constructed without prior inspection of the documents would no doubt exclude many important categories and include many that are superfluous or unnecessary.

Data relating to parent respondents and professional educator respondents were analysed similarly but separately. The typed transcripts were read in their entirety twice. This was felt to be a necessary and valuable preliminary step in the process of analysis, giving the researcher a familiarity with, and a feeling for, the data as a whole.

The research problems of the study provided the basic structure for the analysis. These generated two broad categories of data. One was data related to the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward parent participation in local school decision-making, and included the perceptions of both groups concerning the existing role of parents. The second broad category concerned factors which parents and professional educators reported are related to their attitudes toward parent participation in local school decision-making and parents' propensity to participate. These broad categories constituted the first distinction made between the data. No categories were adopted in advance of the data analysis within the specific research problems of the study. Rather, the data were scrutinized and categories were developed directly from the data.

The first step in the analysis involved the coding of the data in accordance with the specific research problems of the study. Any data considered to be related to a particular research problem were coded accordingly. A copy was then made of all the transcripts. Each transcript was then cut up and all data relating to a particular research problem were placed in a coded folder. Each folder then contained all data which were considered to be related to a particular research problem. The data in each folder were then carefully unitized. Units of data consist of both the actual words spoken by the respondents -- paragraphs, sentences and words -- and ideas and expressions of thought that might emerge from a study of the words spoken.

A master list of the coded units of data was then compiled from which categories could be developed and labelled in accordance with the content and meaning attached to the units of data which made up the various categories. The categories, and their component units of data, were then further explored in order that any underlying patterns and relationships might be identified and described and in order that the researcher's understanding of the data should be as complete as possible.

Presentation of findings. The findings of the study are presented in the following three chapters.

In presenting the findings of the study, the basic objective of the researcher is to convince readers of the study of the accuracy and credibility of the findings. As Bogden and Biklen (1982:177) note:

> There is no formal convention used to establish the truth in a qualitative research paper. Your task is to convince the reader of the plausibility of your presentation.

The data upon which the findings of this study are based consist of personally reported attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences of the individual respondents, embedded in the unique and personal experiences of each one of them. Particular care has been taken to maximize the trustworthiness of the data. Accordingly, the findings of the study will be presented in a way that places heavy reliance upon the actual words of respondents. The interpretations, generalizations and explanations offered by the researcher in the findings will necessarily depend for their support and acceptance upon the words of the individuals whose testimony precipitated the findings presented. Findings related to parent and professional educator respondents are reported separately in each chapter.

THE VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

In conducting research with a qualitative orientation, the researcher must strive to maximize the validity, or trustworthiness, of the data and the findings reported. His problem, as Rockhill (1982:12) notes, is "one of capturing human intent and reality -- of matching the researcher's conclusions and the actors' intentions."

Validity may be conceptualized as " the best approximation of the truth" (Smith, 1981:134), and the validity of a measuring instrument, according to Black and Champion, (1976:222) depends upon the extent to which:

> . . . the instrument measured what it is supposed to measure . . . , does the measuring device reveal the true degree of some trait or characteristic a person presumably possesses?

According to Kaplan (1964:198), validity has to do with the value of the data. It "consists in what it is able to accomplish, or more accurately, in what we are able to do with it." Kaplan (1964:198) stresses that:

> Validity is not determined just by the instrument and scale of measurement. We must take into account as well the functions of the inquiry which the measurement is intended to perform, or with respect to which . . . its data are being assessed. The basic question is always whether the measures have been so arrived at that they can serve efficiently as means to that given end.

Towards Validity

In this study the researcher sought to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward parent participation in local school decision-making and the factors related to those attitudes. The validity of the study, then, depends upon the extent to which the data collected constitute an accurate and real representation of those attitudes and related factors. A second fundamental requirement, as Rose (1982:131) notes, is that the researcher's results are consistent with the data. In discussing the evaluation of qualitative research, Denzin (1982) stresses that the findings should have a sense of authenticity. Denzin (1982:20) asks:

> Are the researcher's observations and records grounded in the natural, everyday language, behaviors, meaning and intention of those studied?

Guba (1980) and Guba and Lincoln (1982) propose a range of strategies that might be adopted by researchers seeking to maximize the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the findings of a study. A number of the suggested strategies have been adopted in the conduct of this study. Peer debriefing, during the conduct of the study, and member checks, during and after the data collection, are among the strategies suggested to maximize the credibility or believability of the findings. Peer debriefing involves opportunities for the researcher to test his growing insight in respect to the study and expose himself to searching questions related to the study by, for example, colleagues or members of a dissertation committee. This procedure was used by the researcher in the course of the conduct of the study.

Member checks, or member validation (Shaffin et al., 1980:14), involve the evaluation of the data and tentative interpretations by members of the various groups from which data has been collected. According to Guba (1980:21) "the process of member checks is the single most important action which an inquirer can take for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion." During the collection of data, and prior to the preparation of the final report, the researcher had the opportunity to discuss his findings and interpretations with parents and professional educators.

A strategy suggested to maximize the dependability of findings is the establishment of an audit trail (Guba, 1980:24). An audit trail is a means by which an external auditor could examine the processes whereby the data were collected and analyzed, and interpretations made. The researcher has available for examination the actual interview tapes and typed transcripts, with information relating to the coding and categorization process used.

McCall and Simmons (1969:77) note that having adopted a method of data collection which is recognized by social scientists, what remains to be established in a given study is that the technique was adequately employed -- systematically, comprehensively and rigorously. When speaking of the rigor of employment, McCall and Simmons (1969:77) are concerned that:

> . . . the technique was employed with adequate safeguards against the many potentially invalidating or contaminating factors which threaten to diminish the interpretability of the resulting data.

A number of procedures were adopted to ensure that the data collected were as real and accurate an expression of the attitudes of respondents as possible.

1. Development of the interview guide. Prior to the development of the interview guide, a preliminary study was conducted involving a group of parents and professional educators which consisted of an intensive, unstructured interview with each individual related to the proposed area of study. The objective of the

preliminary study was to determine the means of data collection that was most likely to yield the type of data required and to gain some insight into particular areas of the topic that should be pursued, areas that would be both relevant to the study and appropriate to the particular context in which the study was to be conducted. The findings of the preliminary study were discussed with colleagues and members of the researcher's dissertation committee prior to the development of a draft interview guide.

A second phase of the preliminary study was then conducted involving a different, but similar, group of parents and professional educators. Trial interviews were conducted and tape-recorded. At the conclusion of each interview respondents were questioned about the clarity, meaning and relevance of the topic pursued and the questions asked. As a result of the feedback received, several questions were deleted from the guide and others were reformulated. The researcher also learned important lessons in interviewing technique. One was to talk less and give respondents more time to think. Another was not to prolong the interview after an optimum length had been reached.

The interview guide used as a basis for all interviews in the study was then developed and submitted for examination to members of the researcher's dissertation committee.

2. The methodology. The method of data collection is recognized in the literature as legitimate, and was adopted because of its appropriateness for the purpose of the study.

3. The conduct of the interviews. All interviews were conducted in accordance with recommended principles and procedures, and an attempt was made to ensure that possible biasing effects were minimized.

4. The knowledge and experience of the researcher. The value of a researcher having experience and knowledge in the field of study, and the consequences this can have for the validity of the interview data collected and the credibility of the findings reported, is referred to in the literature (Dexter, 1970:17; Eckhardt and Erman, 1977:225; Black and Champion, 1976:370).

The researcher has been intimately involved in the area of parent-school relations for over 20 years; for 15 years as a teacher and school administrator and for the past six years as a school system administrator whose role includes a substantial component related to parent-school interaction at the local school level.

SUMMARY

In this chapter a description, rationale, and justification for the research design and research methodology has been presented, and procedures adopted to maximize the validity of the study have been outlined.

This was a descriptive study. Its purpose was to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making. An inductive approach was adopted, and the objective of the researcher was to achieve as complete an understanding of the attitudes and beliefs of respondents as possible.

The semi-structured interview was adopted as the means of data collection in consideration of the appropriateness of this technique for the purpose of the study and for the type of data required. The method of data collection was described. Particular steps were taken to maximize the likelihood that the data collected would be as accurate and realistic a representation of the attitudes and beliefs of the respondents as possible. The data were analyzed using a process of content analysis. This involved the itemization, codification and categorization of the data.

In presenting the findings of the study the basic objective of the researcher was to convince the reader of the accuracy and credibility of the study. Extensive use has been made of the actual words of respondents to support the explanations and generalizations offered and to give the presentation a sense of authenticity.

Procedures adopted to maximize the validity of the data and findings were outlined. These were peer debriefing, member checks and the establishment of an audit trail. It was further contended that the process used in the development of the interview guide, the conduct of the interviews, the methodology adopted and the knowledge and experience of the researcher in the area of study have all contributed to the validity of the study and the credibility of its findings.

CHAPTER 4

THE CURRENT ROLE OF PARENTS IN SCHOOLS

The findings of the study are presented in the next three chapters. In presenting the findings of the study the saliency of reported opinions was considered. An opinion was considered salient if it was held by at least five parents (21% of the parent sample) or four professional educators (20% of the professional educator sample). On some occasions lower standards for inclusion were adopted for particular illustrative purposes. In this chapter findings are presented in relation to Research Problem 1, which reads:

> What is the nature of the current role of parents in local school decision-making and how is this role assessed by parents and professional educators?

and Research Problem 2, which reads:

> How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

SOLICITATION OF PARENT OPINIONS: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

1.1. Is parent opinion sought concerning important issues in the operation of the school?

Almost all of the parent respondents reported that school personnel did not normally solicit parents' input concerning matters of importance related to the operation of their children's school. One parent expressed what was a commonly held feeling when she said:

> I can never remember being asked my opinion on anything worthwhile . . . , anything that really affects what our children are being taught.

Another parent who felt similarly commented:

> . . . no I don't think they do [seek our opinions]. They always have their meetings and things and they encourage you to come out, but you're not really asked your opinion on anything.

Parents who reported an apparent unwillingness by school personnel to seek their input in the school policy-making process were divided in their view concerning why this was so. A number of parents suggested that the decision not to seek parent opinion on particular issues was consciously or unconsciously made by the school principal or staff and that it was generally decided in the negative. As one parent suggested:

> Principals and teachers decide there should be one decision-maker. I don't feel that way, but I don't feel that we have any choice in the matter.

Other parents also saw the role of the principal as being decisive. One parent observed:

> . . . if he thinks he can do something without consulting the parents and pull it off, then he may not go to the effort of seeking parent opinion.

Constraints imposed by the School Board and provincial regulations were also identified as limiting the extent to which school personnel could solicit parent input in key policy areas. The view was put by one parent that:

> . . . both the principal and staff in general is under very strict guidelines set down by the School Board, and I don't really feel they can go too far out of a very narrow scope. If they do start to fish for suggestions

> for policy and so on, I don't think that the School Board appreciates it.

Other parents saw the provincial curriculum guidelines as restrictive. One parent believed that schools:

> . . . are given a framework in which to work. I don't know how much freedom they have to choose within that framework, but obviously they are set by the government and provincial regulations, and this is what they have to do.

Parents were clearly of the opinion that the extent of parents' input into the policy-making process in their local school depended largely upon the degree to which parents themselves were prepared to take the initiative and communicate their views to the school principal or staff. As one parent commented:

> . . . I feel that if I wanted to find out what the policies were, I would have to show an interest and then my questions would be answered.

Another parent expressed a similar view:

> . . . if you were not an outspoken person, an opinionated person, a person that would investigate and have a valid opinion, I think no-one would come to you and say, "What do you think?"

SOLICITATION OF PARENT OPINION: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Professional educators differed in their views concerning the extent to which school personnel sought the opinions of parents concerning matters of importance related to the operation of the school.

School principals were unanimous that the views of parents were solicited and taken account of in most matters of importance. Their means of gaining that input varied from the use of parents as "sounding boards" in a very informal way to the more formal use of structured advisory mechanisms. Often combinations of methods were used. The principal of a school with a formal advisory structure commented, "We have a formal parent-advisory council for the programs within our school, and for major matters their reaction is sought." The principal of a school without a formal structure used familiar parents to gain opinions and information. He commented:

> They serve as an over the backyard fence gossip-line. You know, if somebody's bitching, and they don't have the courage to come and say, "Hey, I don't like what's happening," through the rumor-mill they [familiar parents] are able to relay it [to me].

Teachers generally differed from principals in their perceptions of the extent to which parents' opinion was sought. A number of teachers distinguished between the active solicitation of parents' opinion and the willingness of school personnel to receive those opinions and concerns whenever parents initiated that contact. School personnel were reported to be open and receptive to the expression of parents' views or concerns. The climate described by this teacher reflects that described in the other schools, " . . . I think there's a climate that parents who are interested can always have access to the school." A principal who noted that he had an "open door policy" commented:

> It's very seldom that door's closed. Parents are welcome to come, it's an open door to everyone -- kids, staff, parents . . . some take the opportunity, some don't.

Most teachers reported that parents' input was sought, even entertained, only on some issues and only under certain conditions. One teacher commented:

> I feel that there are specific areas where parent input is sought, and also feel that there are some things in the school that are absolutely not open . . . . I think it's important to our administration that they be in control of what's happening, and the administration, then, has made some decisions about what will and will not be delegated.

The infrequent appeal to parent opinion initiated by the school was also referred to by this teacher who explained:

> They give their input on some kinds of issues [but] only a few times in almost three years parents [views] have been specifically requested.

Six of the sixteen teacher respondents felt that parents' opinion was seldom sought on matters which those teachers considered to be important. Those teachers described a decision-making process dominated by professional opinion in all areas other than those specifically delegated to parents. As one teacher saw the process " . . . decisions are usually made by the staff and the principal and the parents are informed." This view was shared by the teacher who commented:

> I don't think [the school] necessarily seeks the opinion to help set up the order, to start something in the school . . . . They [parents] don't actually give us input while we're making a decision. It's sort of thrown out to them after we've made it.

The most commonly profferred explanation for the tendency of school personnel to restrict their solicitation of parents' input to particular decision areas related in one way or another to professional educators' perception of their role in the school. One teacher described her feelings:

> I don't want this to sound like it's harsh and mean or anything, but I think that there's a lot of decisions parents can be involved in, and I think we need their input to make it the kind of school that we've got it now . . . , but I think there's still things like the actual way we as individuals may be teaching the kids, the materials we choose . . . , that we are just better qualified to make those decisions, and that's why they have hired professionals to do that kind of thing.

Other teachers were more forthright in asserting their conception of the professional role. In describing the decision-making process in her school, one teacher commented:

> . . . sometimes the waters aren't even tested. We're the decision-makers and we're running our school the way we feel it should be done . . . . We have a lot of confidence and faith in what we do. We don't feel that they [parents] should have any concerns, and we're open if they do want to come in.

In considering why parents' opinion was not sought more often in relation to important issues, this teacher suggested:

> I guess probably because there is a certain fear that perhaps once parents are asked to make a very important decision that they will expect to be asked later on, and I think our basic fear is that we really don't want parents running the school.

ISSUES AND PARENT OPINION: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

1.2. On what type of issues is parent opinion most, and least, likely to be sought by school personnel?

Parents distinguished between decision areas in which their opinion was most likely to be sought and taken account of and those that were generally perceived by professional educators to be inappropriate for parent participation. Parents felt that decision areas they described as "professional," "to do with the core subjects" or "curriculum and general administration" were areas in which their opinions were neither sought nor particularly welcome. One parent described his perception of the distinction this way:

> . . . the things that aren't meat and potatoes are decisions that can be made by parents . . . . The school very consciously retains control over what is seen as professional matters.

In referring to the example of a recent school advisory council meeting she attended, a parent said:

> . . . it was made very obvious to us that we couldn't change, question, or even opinions we had weren't to be considered, on the core subjects, and this is the area most of us are concerned about.

Concern that the area of school curriculum policy was apparently considered inappropriate for parents' input was also voiced by other parents. In identifying decision areas in which parents' opinion was unlikely to be sought, one parent suggested that:

> . . . the prime example would be curriculum. That's something that they wouldn't seek parental input on; that's something that I think they should seek parental input on.

Another parent complained, " . . . as for school programing . . . , we are not even allowed the luxury of an opinion on what should be there."

Parents perceived that the most common forms of involvement offered were far removed from important areas of the school's operation. One parent expressed what was a common sentiment:

> . . . they are the peripherals. Are you happy with our sports program? Do you like our outings for the children? When it comes to our opinion on homework they don't want to know because they have been told often and they don't want to know.

The same parent explained:

> We're concerned about the academic performance. We're very concerned with the basic academic situation, with expectations in the school. This is an area where we're not welcome, and [this] creates a great deal of frustration and animosity.

To some parents it was evident that school personnel sought their support and assistance mainly in a helping capacity, and were generally unwilling to allow parents a more meaningful role in the key decision-making areas. One parent lamented:

> What they ask me is, "We're making flags for Universiade, can you fold them?" That is important to them and I did it, but it really has nothing to do with the school. "We need cup cakes; can you please make this many cup cakes? If so sign the little application form."

The service-based nature of the parents' role was emphasized by the parent who observed:

> I go to the school and help in the workroom there and I do their laminating or put together a social studies project or something like that, and I can see what they're going to be taught in the near future . . . , but we're never asked for an opinion.

ISSUES AND PARENT OPINION: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Most professional educator respondents also distinguished between decision areas related to the operation of the school that were considered more, or less, appropriate for parent involvement or participation. There was a strongly held opinion that decisions in a school could be broadly categorized as professional and non-professional. Issues and decision areas which professional educators defined as intimately involved with the performance of their professional role were seen to be the prerogative of the professional educator. While there was some variation in their definition of professional, in general, the term incorporated the whole area of curriculum and instruction, with somewhat more emphasis on the methodological aspects than on program content. For some professional educators, however, the term professional had wider connotations and included most substantive decisions made in relation to the operation of the school. For example, one principal included matters related to staffing and school organization, as well as curriculum, in his definition of professional and in so doing deemed those areas as less appropriate for parent participation in decision-making. He commented:

> . . . like staffing, they [parents] have no role in that. In my estimation I would not operate as a principal if I had parents telling me who I would keep or who I should hire . . . , any final decision in terms of the overall organization of the school, they [parents] have no decision in that. I don't mind having opinions expressed . . . , but they are just that, they are opinions and I reserve the right to make the final decision in, of course, consultation with my staff.

Areas of decision that professional educators considered inappropriate for parent participation are listed in Table 4.0. The statements emphasized the professional-

Table 4.0

Areas of Decision Considered Inappropriate for Parent Participation. Professional Educator Statements.

- Methodology or materials.
- Academic-type decisions.
- Participation only if the issue is very public or controversial.
- No areas should be specifically barred.
- I will listen on anything.
- Curriculum or discipline.
- Any major policy issues.
- Decisions to do with school business.
- Curriculum.
- Not anything to do with overall school organization, only decisions of a general nature.
- Not anything professional.
- Not curriculum issues, not professional issues.
- Nothing. We are the professionals.
- Only enrichment and non-professional areas.
- Nothing. Only fundraising.
- Not curriculum or teaching processes.

non-professional dichotomy evident in the minds of many professional educators in regard to parents' participation in school decision-making.

Principals and teachers were convinced that their professional training and the limited background of most parents constituted sufficient justification for their control of decision-making in areas they defined as professional. The views of this teacher were shared by many others. She stated:

> . . . any decisions that have to do with teaching the children, what happens in the school, that's up to the teachers. That's our job. We're called professionals. We're supposed to make those decisions and we do . . . but if it's something for the school, like for a centennial project or something and we want it, then yeah, maybe we would go there.

Similarly another teacher explained:

> . . . I feel, being an educator, having been trained in that field, that the really core input and that kind of thing should be more my decision than someone popping in and saying, "Well gee, I saw this in another school and it really was great and I think you should do that." I'm really interested in what happens to my kids so I want to be in control.

Three of the four principals saw a clear distinction between decision areas more, and less, appropriate for parent participation. In the words of one principal:

> Most definitely . . . , parents have a right to know what we do, but I'm not sure -- they probably have a right to know how we do it, I'm just not sure they have the time or we have the time to educate them fully enough in those areas. A little bit of knowledge can be dangerous.

Another principal commented that he reserved certain decisions for himself:

> I know that there are definitely things that I will make decisions about, and it will be my decision, but I hope in most cases that I have at least heard the information that is necessary, be it from teachers, parents, central administration.

One principal indicated that he could not differentiate between areas of decision that were more, or less, appropriate for parent involvement. He explained:

> I can't think of any. Lots of times I feel that there's nothing really private. I'm willing to share what happens in any area, from discipline to budget. I can't think of anything they [parents] shouldn't be involved in.

Teacher respondents from the same school, a school without a formal parent-advisory structure, were the most convinced that parents' input was regularly invited on a broad range of policy matters. This group of teachers were also less certain about decision areas they regarded as more, or less, appropriate for parent input and participation.

Principals and teachers often referred to constraints imposed upon them in the area of curriculum and instruction by the curriculum regulations set down by Alberta Education and the Edmonton Public School Board. For some, these constraints contributed in a significant way to the inability of school personnel to entertain parent input concerning matters related to curriculum. One teacher explained that:

> . . . in this province the curriculum is imposed down. The school doesn't really have a choice, the teachers don't really have a choice, and the curriculum's taught only in the way that it's taught. And that is the area that I think parents would like to contribute most in, and so teachers would hesitate to raise that expectation.

Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment when she noted that:

> . . . on curriculum matters there's not much of a choice. We have a certain program to follow and we have to follow it, so that would be an issue where we couldn't seek parental input because we're limited in our input as well . . .

Decision areas and activities in which parent involvement and participation was considered most common or most appropriate could be categorized as supportive and service-based in orientation. One teacher summarized beliefs implicit in the reports of many principals and teachers:

> There are a lot of things that are motivational. They can become traditions -- the Christmas concerts, the spring carnival, story theatres, the track meets, a lot of things that schools do . . . , and we elicit the help of parents in order to carry them off.

A principal described the function of parents in his school:

> . . . basically to assist the school in whether it be fundraising projects, or projects for which we may need parent assistance. One of the ones we're going to be needing now for instance is assistance in the banner project for Universiade. It could be fundraising projects for something that we want to do -- be it field trips, be it camps or be it something special, maybe even another computer if we want to buy it.

The same principal observed that parents also assist the school in other ways:

> It could be listening to children read, it could be making posters, it could be laminating, it could be typing, it could be working in the library, and these are the roles that parents willingly assume.

In discussing his perception of the role of the parent-advisory group in his school, one teacher commented:

> I think their goals and objectives are to support us, to help us. When we need certain kinds of volunteers to help if possible, to raise monies for which we can't get money . . . , but I think more than anything else [it] is to be supportive [of the school] in the community.

In general, principals and teachers perceived the role of parents in the school as one which supports the school by providing services desired by school personnel, by fundraising, and by being supportive of what the school is doing. While principals and some teachers were adamant that parents' input into most major areas of policy was solicited and taken account of, in describing the role of parents in practice, mention was invariably limited to the service and support component of that role. As one teacher commented in describing the role of parents in her school:

> I think there is a lot of work done in the school in terms of being pleased to see parents, in showing parents through the school and that kind of thing, but when it comes to the really major decisions, I don't think the community is invited to give a whole lot of input.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 1.3. What means do parents currently have to communicate their views and opinions to school personnel and how do parents and professional educators assess these means?

Parents reported that they had access to a range of means by which they were able to communicate views or concerns related to particular matters to the school principal or staff. One group of means were those where parents communicated directly, and individually, with school personnel. These included formal or informal conversation with a principal or staff member, contact directly by telephone or letter, or direct contact through parent-teacher interview. A second mode of communication was facilitated through one form or another of structural arrangements initiated at the school. Three schools had such a structure. In the case of two schools formal advisory structures were in place. In the third school interested parents were invited to informal meetings with the principal.

Direct Means of Communication

Parents of children attending all four schools in the study referred to the free access available to them to communicate on any matter directly with the school principal or individual teachers. Without exception, parents felt free to contact their school principal at any time and reported high confidence that they would be cordially received and would be assured of a good hearing. The comments presented below are representative of what was a clearly communicated feeling of parents:

> If there is something that has come up that I feel needs my attention . . . . I simply go into the school and I always talk to the principal first. If he feels it necessary to call a teacher in and discuss a situation, he will do it. A lot of times the situation is solved just by talking to him . . . , but at any time he always gives us an ear. He always does and [he] makes an effort to explain what has happened.

> I think that ____ is a particularly open school in terms of their sensitivity or awareness of the need for the school community. That is, the professionals within the school being accessible to the parents whose children go there . . . . I feel quite comfortable approaching anyone there at any one of a number of levels, in an

> informal or casual conversation with the teachers, and I know that I will be listened to and that they will follow up on it, and they certainly make that clear.

Indirect Means of Communication

Indirect means by which parents' opinions could be conveyed to school personnel were available to parents of children attending three of the four schools in the study. In two cases, formal parent-advisory structures had been initiated whereby parents, or elected representatives of parents, met with the principal on a regular basis and with a degree of formality during which time matters of a mutual concern could be raised and discussed. In the third case, a more informal approach had been implemented. Interested parents were invited to regular evenings with the principal when matters of interest and concern could be raised and discussed. All three groups lacked any legal standing or authority and, in theory, continued to function at the pleasure of the school principal.

All parent respondents of children attending those schools referred to the existence of the structures, and all identified that structure as one vehicle that they could use to have issues raised or to convey opinions to school personnel.

Means of Communication: The Preference of Parents

Parents who had a choice between the use of direct and indirect means of communication with the school were almost unanimous in their view that the direct means available to them were generally the most effective. Further, most of those parents indicated a strong personal preference for the use of direct means of communication. Parents classified as highly involved were just as strong in their personal preference for direct communication on most matters.

In general, parents considered direct communication with the principal or teacher concerned was more likely to have successful outcomes for them. As one parent commented:

> I would always choose the direct means. I am not going to sit and stew about something for two and three weeks.

A parent active in her school's advisory group saw the group as only marginally successful:

> . . . because I think [the principal] sees us as a support group in his sort of minor running of the school. I think we are more effective if we individually phone up and talk to him, . . . on a one-to-one basis I think is more effective than just our general P.T.A.

Another parent of children attending a school with a formal advisory structure admitted:

> Well, I haven't used it. I think perhaps it would be [effective], especially if it was a subject that was affecting all the children in a particular grade. I don't even know who that [room representative] is. I have it on a list someplace . . . . I'd much rather the direct route.

Several parents did distinguish between matters that would be more appropriately dealt with directly and matters which could be effectively raised in the group context. One highly involved parent who saw this distinction commented:

> . . . if I felt welcome I would take [the matter] directly to the principal or teacher. Some things I would prefer probably to discuss in a parent-teacher meeting because, things like basically the overall academic thing. You want to know what the heck the rest of the people are thinking too, and to me this is the primary advantage of this kind of organization.

The only parents who identified the advisory group as a viable means of raising certain matters with the school principal and staff were parents who are, or have been, actively involved in those groups. Most of those parents, however, were highly circumspect in their assessment of the effectiveness of the group of which they were a part. No other parents viewed the advisory group as a viable means by which they might have matters of interest or concern raised with school personnel. Several highly involved parents visualized an important purpose for a permanent advisory structure, despite their own inclination to deal directly with the individuals concerned. Most parents categorized as highly involved believed in the need for some form of permanent structure. Some saw the purpose in terms of achieving greater continuity within the school.

> I think the thing that we as parents would be most anxious to try and do is to create an air of continuity, that there is a limited turnover of teachers, especially the good ones, that there is a knowing and a growth experience in terms of our being responsive, one group to the other, and that there is a continuation of program.

Other parents had a more down to earth perspective. As one commented:

> . . . you have to have some type of committee, liason between the parents and the school because if you don't you get a mob scene, that's what it is. All the parents

> talking together. Everybody has different ideas as to what to do, and that's what it is, a mob scene.

The parent respondents at one of the schools with a formal advisory structure perceived a deliberate attempt on the part of the principal to minimize and trivialize the role of the advisory group. They felt a lack of responsiveness on the part of the principal and staff and sensed a profound distrust between the principal and staff and at least a proportion of the parents of children attending the school. Parents conceived a different role for the advisory group and a different relationship between school personnel and parents than they believed had been defined for them by the principal. One parent not intimately involved in the parent advisory group commented that at her school:

> . . . the parents meet as a group, the principal and teachers meet as a group and the principal acts as a go-between, but it's seldom that the parents, principal and teachers can all get together to discuss things . . . , it may be he's shielding his teachers from what he feels may be undue or unfair criticism, . . . or whether they're perhaps afraid of what the parents are trying to make them do and they don't really want to go that way so they act as a stop gap between the parents meeting the teachers.

From the perspective of active advisory group members, the responsibility for the existing state of tension at the school rested with the principal. In the view of one parent, the advisory structure "should, in the normal way things seem to have worked in the past, be a very effective way of communicating with the school." Instead:

> What has happened is, for the last year, no teachers have come, and I've been told . . . , not directly

> . . . , that it's the principal's decision. I've certainly been told by some teachers that they've been told not to come. So you can see how a wall, or a chasm, has built up here separating . . . , what should be our most immediate and viable avenue of communication.

Satisfaction with Existing Means of Communication

Parents reported that they were generally satisfied with the current means available to them to communicate their opinions or concerns to the school. For almost all parents, the existing means referred to one or another mode of direct communication, usually face-to-face interaction with the school principal or teacher concerned. Parents' satisfaction with the existing means was almost always related to their perception of the school performance or welfare of their children, of the accessibility of school personnel, and the receptivity of school personnel to their needs and concerns.

Satisfaction and children's progress. For a substantial proportion of parents there was a link between their satisfaction with existing modes of communication and the absence of perceived problems concerning their children at school. The relationship is clearly evident in the comment of this parent:

> . . . our children seem to be doing well, their report cards are good and they're happy, and so there hasn't been a problem.

Another parent expressed a similar sentiment:

> . . . we haven't had any difficulties . . . , with any of our children or with the things that the school has

> done . . . , and so we haven't had to push in order to get results from anything.

Satisfaction and accessibility and approachability. A relationship was also indicated between parents' satisfaction with the existing opportunities for communication and parents' perception of the accessibility and approachability of the school principal and staff. As one parent commented:

> I think they [the means] are there if you want to avail yourself . . . . It's you that has to get up and say, "This issue is important enough for me to go to that level," and that level is there for you to go to.

A similar position was adopted by the parent who reported:

> Well it's open, it's there, it's available. It's up to me to use it and there are different routes to go. So, yes, I think at the school we're at it's sufficient, but it's whether I choose to make use of what's available.

While parents felt free to contact school personnel whenever the need arose to do so, and as long as they were confident of receiving a fair and sympathetic hearing, parent satisfaction with the existing opportunities for communication with the school was likely to be high. As one parent commented, she was satisfied ". . . as long as I know that the principal is always willing to talk to me about something that's bothering me."

Satisfaction and receptivity. Parents also related their satisfaction with the existing opportunities for communication to their perception of the receptivity of school personnel to parents' advances. Parents felt that, in general, they could rely on the school principal and staff to do all possible to act on their concerns and take account of their opinions, and this feeling clearly reinforced their satisfaction with a direct mode of communication. In describing his feelings about approaching the school, one parent commented:

> . . . there is receptivity there, and the teachers and the principal and the rest of the administration demonstrate a willingness not only to listen but to follow up on it.

The importance of a feeling that your opinions are valued comes also from this comment:

> . . . it [direct communication] is fine because they [the school personnel] make it easy because they are receptive and always encouraging people.

One parent explained how her direct approach was well-received and acted upon by the school principal:

> I went to him [the principal]. My oldest daughter is very smart and they have an enrichment program at the school, and I went and talked to him about it because I thought it might be good for her . . . , and the next year he had talked to the teacher and she was put in it without all the redtape that they usually have to go through . . . . So talking to him was all that I had to do.

Only two parents indicated any substantial dissatisfaction with the current opportunities for communication with school personnel. Both were highly involved parents in the school where tension existed between school personnel and parents. The basis for both parents' dissatisfaction was an alleged lack of response from the principal and staff towards their concerns and opinions.

Satisfaction and a Formal Structure

The existence, or absence, of a formal parent-advisory structure was not related to the level of parents' satisfaction with the existing arrangements for communicating views or concerns to school personnel. Parents of children attending a school without a formal structure did not feel disadvantaged as a consequence. Nor did the parents of children attending a school with such a structure relate its existence to their satisfaction with the existing arrangements. Rather, the judgment that school personnel were accessible, approachable and responsive to parent concerns and needs seems to have been more important to most parents than having or not having a formal structure through which their views might be communicated and attended to.

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

It was reported that parents had available, and made use of, a variety of direct and indirect means to convey opinions or concerns to school personnel when it was felt necessary to do so.

Direct Means of Communication

The most widely used method of communication was one or other form of direct communication. Usually, this involved a face-to-face meeting between an individual parent and the school principal or staff member. Professional educators encouraged, and preferred, direct to more indirect means. Principals and teachers representative of all four schools made reference to an "open-door" policy which, it was claimed, guaranteed parents access to the principal and staff members at any time, thereby encouraging direct communication. This teacher expressed what was a commonly held sentiment:

> They [parents] can walk in whenever they want. This school is literally an open-door school. The parents have free access to come in . . . , every parent in the community is invited. There is no reason why they [parents] can't walk in the door and be heard any day of the week.

A principal expressed similar sentiments when he said:

> I think you will find the majority [of parents] are quite aware that it's a very open school in terms of approachability. We don't have a long chain of stops before they reach me. I'm very approachable and so are my staff members.

Indirect Means of Communication

Principals and teachers generally agreed that, for a number of reasons, the more formal arrangements for parent-school communication have proved less effective as forums for the raising of issues and for the communication of parent opinion than might have been hoped. In the school where tension existed between school personnel and parents, the principal saw a lack of precision in the role statement of the advisory group as the main problem. The principal was concerned that:

> . . . the lack of delineation between 'what' and 'how', that the parents, a small group want to get involved in the 'how', and this is a foreign thing to the staff to have people involved in the 'how'. It's like you are a master chef and you are in the kitchen cooking, and someone comes in and wants to get involved in the 'how'. I mean the 'what' you have no problem with . . .

In the other school with a formal advisory structure the principal saw the problem in the personnel that were involved. He commented that the effectiveness of the advisory group:

> . . . depends totally upon the people you have on the advisory committee at the time . . . , you'll find this year it has not been as good because, not because of the people, but because of the leaders.

A teacher at the same school commented in regard to the effectiveness of the advisory committee:

> . . . I don't think that it is that efficient and I could probably fault us and I could probably fault the parents . . . . True, sometimes they discuss issues, but they don't meet often enough . . . , the structure is there [but] the structure is a parent group and not a parent-teacher-administration group.

Nor were the less formal meetings of parents and school personnel seen to be any more effective as a vehicle for the communication of opinion or concern. It was commonly felt that these were seldom successful:

> . . . because not enough people bother to come. It's always the same gang, and yet that group is the nucleus, form the basis, for everything that happens in the school.

Another teacher had a similar concern:

> . . . parents who attend these meetings are certainly caring parents and their views are known, but I'm not convinced it is the view of the whole community. They are the noisy people. Therefore what they want will be listened to and probably they will get within limits.

Suitability of the Means of Communication

Principals and teachers were almost unanimous that the available modes of communication were sufficient to meet the needs of most parents. Principals and teachers stressed their accessibility and approachability and emphasized that parents were free and welcome to contact school personnel at any time with the guarantee of a cordial and courteous hearing. It was widely believed that parents were aware of this accessibility, were confident of a warm reception, and they would be unlikely not to express a particular view or concern when the need arose to do so. One teacher expressed a common view when she stated:

> . . . if they know that they can walk into the school at any time, and be heard, I think that's probably one of the biggest things, is to open up the school . . . , to all the parents and their opinion . . .

In schools where both direct and indirect modes of communication were available for use, principals and teachers stressed the availability of choice which could be exercised according to the disposition of the parent concerned. According to this teacher, a choice of modes of communication:

> . . . allow those people who are truly interested and truly concerned to act. So it is not like you are limited and have to attend a parents' meeting. They [parents] have this option, or this option, or both.

PARENT INFLUENCE IN THE SCHOOL: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 1.4. How do parents and professional educators assess the extent of parent influence in school decisions?

The Extent of Parent Influence

Most parents reported that, with certain qualifications, they could be successful in influencing school decision-makers if it became desirable or necessary to do so. That feeling was expressed by the parent who stated:

> Yes I do, I really do [think parents can be influential]. I'm a regular housewife. I feel about my kids the way my friends do and with our voice we can

> change anything if we don't like what's going on. If there's enough of us to say, "We don't like what's going on," they're going to change it naturally or they're going to have problems with the parents.

Some parents described cases where it was felt that parent influence had been successful. One parent commented:

> . . . the parents wanted the French program because they thought it would bring in a better calibre of student, and that did come . . . , that was one place where parent pressure did affect a decision and I think what probably happened here in the long run was that it brought about a change of principal . . . , and there has been a radical change in the school and possibly it was started because of the kind of small protest group which bloomed a bit.

In discussing the extent of parents' potential influence on policy decisions, parents identified the existence of several qualifications. It was evident that most parents perceived their potential influence as being limited and dependent upon certain criteria being met. For parents, the decision area, whether a group or individual strategy was adopted, and the general approach adopted by the parents constituted qualifications upon the potential influence of parents on school decision-makers.

In all parent responses there was an underlying imperative of parent initiative. Parents' influence seemed to be inextricably linked to the extent to which parents, individually or in groups, were prepared to take the initiative in pressing claims for influence in the school policy-making process.

The group strategy. The potential for parents to exert significant influence in the school decision-making process was perceived to be greater when parents' action was coordinated and broadly-based than when parents acted alone or in small groups. As one parent commented, "Basically, as a single [one] person, I feel that my voice is not enough. There has to be a multitude to be heard." A similar position was adopted by the parent who stated:

> Not as an individual, no. If it were a school policy, definitely, I can't see one or two or even half a dozen parents being concerned about the same policy having a drastic affect.

The nature of the issue. Parents were satisfied that their potential influence in school decision-making was related in an important way to the nature of the issue, to the decision area in which influence was sought. In the same way that parents identified decision areas in which their opinion was unlikely to be sought, so they perceived that their influence was likely to be minimal in those same areas. Influence in what parents termed professional areas was perceived as being minimal. As one parent suggested:

> As for the extra things, we were quite influential. Now as far as the everyday curriculum things, no . . . , the curriculum is up to the teachers . . . , we definitely have our parents' areas you know, the areas in which we can be influential.

The approach adopted. Some parents related what they termed the reasonableness of the demand and the manner in which parents attempted to exert influence to the likelihood of success. It was generally agreed that parents needed to ensure that their demands were reasonable, that their case was carefully prepared and that they approached their task in an ordered and rational way. In relation to the demands made, one parent observed:

> Well, I think, if parents are reasonable that they can have a great deal of effect. [But] at that parents' meeting that I was at, they wanted all their kids to come to the same school and the E.P.S.B. [Edmonton Public School Board] to build a gym. Well that's not reasonable, so all the parent involvement in the world wouldn't bring it to pass.

Other parents noted the value of a planned and ordered campaign. One recalled:

> . . . any time that we had anything, and we've had all our facts together, our information together, we've been successful, we've had no problem. And no resistance.

The Influence of the Individual

In commenting upon the extent to which parents could be influential in local school decision-making, a number of parents referred to their feelings as an individual striving to exert influence. For some parents the experience was perceived as successful in which case that mode of operation tended to be reinforced. For other parents the experience tended to have negative outcomes. One parent described her successful approach:

> You have to be persistent. I don't know what subjects would make them pay attention to you, but I'm the kind of person that I go after them. Because eventually somebody's going to listen. Well other people have said to my husband about me before, "Why is she still at it?". . . But I got my way. I got what I wanted, and then after that I was getting pats on the back from the others who didn't care to get involved.

A parent who was confident he could provide the sort of leadership role necessary to bring about desired changes considered:

> . . . if there was an issue that I felt really strongly about, then I think in the way that I approach it that I could probably help in at least having a group of people sit down and talk to the school , . . . and probably if need be, be strong enough if a change were needed . . . , I think I could do that as well.

Other parents were less optimistic. One parent, in commenting on the amount of influence he was able to exert on school decision-makers, lamented:

> Zip, really. I feel I can talk until I'm blue in the face about a certain thing, but unless the principal and staff agree with me, I won't have any influence.

Another parent also linked his potential for success with the attitude of the school principal:

> . . . in my experience here, I would have to say that it depends totally on how the principal happens to feel about life in general and his position. If there's a principal in place who wants your input then I think you could have a lot [of influence], but if you have a principal that doesn't want it, you're up against a stone wall.

While several parents spoke of their mode of activity being reinforced by their feeling of success, it was also apparent that in no case were parents who considered their attempts at exerting influence unsuccessful deterred from further attempts. One such parent explained:

> If I feel that there's something wrong with the school, and a lot of other parents feel that way too, it doesn't matter how much effort you've got to put into it to change it. It's worthwhile to try because you're doing something you feel is right.

Lack of success was reported to have acted as a motivator to this parent, and intensified his desire to achieve greater influence:

> . . . as a matter of fact it has spurred our greater involvement, to the point that it is almost one of my priorities to find him [the principal] a new job. Because my children have to go to this school for a while, and I want that to be a good school.

Frequency of Demand

Almost without exception, parents perceived that in normal circumstances they felt little need to communicate demands to the school principal or staff. Parents related the need to communicate to the academic and personal welfare of their children. While their children's progress was satisfactory and school-related problems were few, parents perceived little need or desire to communicate with school personnel.

There was no indication that parents conceived a role for themselves which was distinct from that adopted when their children failed to make satisfactory progress or some other child-related problem arose. No parent indicated any felt need to inject opinions into the school policy development process as a matter of course.

PARENT INFLUENCE IN THE SCHOOL: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

The Extent of Parent Influence

Principals and teachers were equivocal in their evaluation of the extent to which parents could, and did, influence the direction of decision-making related to the operation of the school. It was reported that, in general, parents had the potential to exert considerable influence on decision-makers and, particularly in relation to specific issues, that influence was clearly evident. In the words of one principal:

> . . . they might not realize that their voice is as powerful as what they think . . . . I listen and if it's reasonable or if there's vital concerns, something is done . . . . I would say that if something comes up as very firm and forceful from the group . . . , then it's probably acted upon and changed if possible.

However, parents' influence was perceived to be linked to particular conditions. The qualification concerning influence was alluded to by this teacher who commented:

> I think the parents' opinion is always considered [but] it always has to fit in with something that is logical and can be put into effect.

The extent of parents' influence was perceived to be related to the strength and organization of parents' demands, the particular decisional area in which the demand was made, and the coincidence of the demand with professional educator opinion.

The strength and organization of demands. Principals and teachers saw a relationship between the manner in which a demand was conveyed, the perception of school personnel as to the breadth of support for the demand, and the perceived reasonableness of the demand in the circumstances, and the potential influence on decisions. If it was apparent that broadly-based support for the demand had been generated, and if it was judged to be a reasonable request, the chances of the demand being accepted were perceived to be greater. For one principal:

> . . . if the total community wanted one thing; if the unanimous opinion of the community is that it wants a French program, then they get a French program, and they did. If it's the unanimous opinion of this community that they wanted an 'academic' program with a more skills-based [program] . . . , and it was the majority, then I would have to work towards that.

The decisional area. The likelihood that the saliency of decisional areas varies for principals and teachers was reinforced by the reported view that the extent of parent influence on decisions was likely to vary according to the decisional area in which the demand was made. In general, demands made in areas defined as intimately related to the role and responsibilities of professional educators were likely to be less successful than demands in areas considered to be peripheral to the professional role. This qualification did not apply where there was close correspondence between the demand and the opinion of professional educators or where the strength of the demand was such that professional opposition was overwhelmed. For example, if an issue became public and reached the news media, or was defined by parents as important enough to mobilize general involvement, even professional opposition might not be sufficient to block the demand.

Coincidence with professional opinion. Principals and teachers reported that the extent of parent influence was likely to vary with the degree of correspondence between the nature of the demand and professional opinion. It was reported that, in general, the greater the distance between the nature of the demand and professional opinion, the less influence parents were likely to exert. A commonly expressed sentiment was that influence will:

> . . . depend on how coincidental [the demand is] with what we want. If they [parents] want something we deem unreasonable or not in our philosophy or parent goals, then I'm sorry, I'll listen but don't count on them being used. However, if they are views that are right in with what we are doing, on the same wave length, they will be used.

The Informal Influence of Parents

Principals commented upon the considerable influence that was exerted by parents in informal interaction of one kind or another. Principals reported that they were frequently influenced in their decision-making by conversations with parents during which opinions were profferred in a casual and informal way relating to a wide range of school policy issues. One principal gave an example of this process in action:

> The other day a parent was in the office, just on a social visit . . . and I just said, "Well what is your reaction if we didn't have report cards next year year?" Well of course she blew up. We had quite a good discussion on reporting. It was on the spur of the moment, but I had been thinking about it so I bounced it off her and got a reaction and stored that reaction as something to consider if I pursue this further.

The Accommodation of Parent Opinion

It was commonly agreed that school principals and staff sought to accommodate what they perceived as basic community values and opinions in the way the school was administered and operated. Whether this accommodation was undertaken in a spirit of cooperation and belief in the primacy of parent opinion or for more pragmatic reasons, principals and teachers perceived that the process operated. In the words of one principal:

> I think you've got to. If you set out not to satisfy, then you could be in for a rough boat ride. I think in my case I may be perceiving them wrong but I have a perception. I set out to provide the education, within the bounds of the building and the amount of staff that we have and what we can offer, and provide what they wish.

A similar position was expressed by the principal who commented:

> Parents have no vote. Their only vote is at the school board elections . . . but they do have involvement in terms of their opinions are sought, and I think you'd be a fool if you went totally against the opinion of all the parents. You can do it, you have the power to do it, but whether you would be around the following year . . . would be another matter.

Frequency of Demand

Principals and teachers indicated that most parents communicated demands to the school principal or staff infrequently and that such communication was almost always related to the progress and welfare of their own children. Only rarely did the majority of parents ever contact the school concerning matters of a more general nature.

The most frequent communication was reported to be with parents described as "the highly involved", "the visible" and "the highly vocal."

THE CURRENT ROLE OF PARENTS: A SYNTHESIS

Despite some differences in emphasis, basic similarities were evident in the way parents and professional educators perceived the current role of parents in their children's school.

The Solicitation of Parent Opinion

Parents felt that their views were seldom solicited prior to the development and adoption of important items of school policy. Principals and teachers generally subscribed to that assessment. While school principals were firm in their view that parents' opinion was frequently sought prior to important decisions being taken, most teachers reported that parents' input was sought or entertained only in certain decisional areas.

Parents and professional educators did, however, distinguish between the active solicitation of opinion and the willingness of school personnel to receive, listen and consider parent opinion communicated upon the initiative of parents.

Professional and Non-Professional Decisions

Parents indicated that their opportunity for involvement was limited to decision areas far removed from the educational experiences of their children. Parents perceived the existence of certain decision areas defined by professional educators as professional, particularly matters related to curriculum and instruction, that were largely outside their scope of influence and closed to their substantive involvement.

Professional educators did, in fact, differentiate between professional and non-professional decisional areas when discussing areas considered more or less appropriate for parent involvement or participation. Matters pertaining to the performance of their professional task in the school, especially matters related to curriculum and instruction, were defined as professional and thereby properly within professional educator decision-making authority.

Parent Opinion and Parent Initiative

There was general agreement between parents and professional educators that much of the initiative for conveying parents' opinion to school decision-makers rested with parents. In fact, parents' input and the extent of their influence in the school decision-making process seemed to depend largely on the extent to which parents were prepared to take the initiative and determine that their opinions would be heard and acted upon.

Communication of Parent Opinion

Parents and professional educator respondents agreed that direct communication, especially one-to-one interaction between a school principal or teacher and a parent, was used most commonly by parents. Parents reported a preference for this means of communication and judged it to be the most likely to result in the resolution of particular problems. Professional educators also preferred this means and encouraged parents to communicate directly with them.

Parents and professional educators from schools with a formal advisory structure agreed that the formal advisory mechanism was not as effective a vehicle for parent-school communication as had been hoped. Parents seldom used the formal structure as a means of raising a concern or expressing an opinion. In one of the schools with a formal structure a state of tension resulted from a basic disagreement between school personnel and parents over the purpose and role of the advisory group.

It is evident that the available means of communication between parents and school personnel satisfied the needs of most parents. Parents and professional educators reported a high level of parent satisfaction with the existing opportunities although it was agreed by both groups that most parents communicated with the school infrequently and usually in connection with the personal academic progress or welfare of their individual children.

Parent Influence

In general, parents and professional educators agreed concerning the influence of parents in school decision-making. Both groups saw the potential influence as considerable but limited according to particular criteria.

The factors related to the extent of parents' influence in the school decision-making process are summarized in Table 4.1. Parents saw their potential

Table 4.1.

Factors Related to the Extent of Parent Influence in

School Decision-Making.

Parents	Professional Educators
1. Strength in numbers. Parents perceived their influence to be greater if demands are presented using a coordinated group approach rather than acting in small groups or as an individual.	1. The strength and organization of the parent demand. Judgments are made about the base of support, the logic and rationale of the demand, and its "reasonableness in the circumstances" in forming attitudes toward parents' demands.
2. The nature of the issue. Demands made in decision areas defined by professional educators as professional are perceived to have little likelihood of success.	2. The nature of the issue. Demands made in decision areas defined as professional are likely to be less successful than demands made in areas considered to be peripheral to the professional role.
3. The style of presentation. Demands conveyed in a rational, considered, and well-planned way, which are reasonable, have the greatest likelihood of being successful.	3. Coincidence with professional opinion. The extent of parents' influence is likely to vary with the degree of correspondence between the nature of the demand and professional opinion.

influence as being largely dependent upon the decisional area in which the decision was made and the extent to which the demand was initiated through group action in a planned and coordinated manner. Parents perceived little chance of exerting influence in an area defined by professional educators as professional unless there was a very broad base of support indicated. Even then the chance of success was not seen to be high in those decision areas. Professional educators also indicated that explicit demands would be more likely to succeed or fail depending on the base of support indicated and the decisional area in which the demand was made. Other factors likely to influence the extent of parents' influence were professional educators' perception of the reasonableness of the demand in the circumstances and the coincidence of the demand with professional opinion. On the other hand, professional educators attributed considerable parent influence to the countless informal contacts between school personnel and parents and reported attempts to align the administrative and operational strategies of the school as closely as possible with professional educators' perception of core community values and beliefs.

There was substantial agreement concerning decisional areas and activities which were perceived as most appropriate for parent involvement and participation. Parents perceived that their involvement was most commonly sought, and most welcome, in service and support activities related to the school. In general, professional educators confirmed that assessment.

PARTICIPATION IN PARTICULAR DECISION AREAS: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 2.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making in particular decision areas?

Decision areas in which parents might appropriately have a more substantive role were discussed with parents. Where spontaneous reference was not made to curriculum and instruction, personnel selection and financial planning, opinion was solicited regarding those decision areas.

Curriculum and Instruction

Seventeen of the twenty-four parent respondents felt that parents should have a greater opportunity to become involved in matters pertaining to curriculum and instruction in their local school. For many of those parents the opportunity for regular and systematic input of parent opinion would suffice. However, a substantial minority, nearly one-third of all parent respondents, advocated a voice for parents in the decision-making process at the point of decision.

Parents desirous of an enlarged role sought input in program content and methodology. Most were seeking the opportunity to contribute in a general sense to broader questions rather than to become involved in the detail of program content and methodology, although this right was reserved by many parents if, and when, this was thought to be necessary. Parents who reported the need for more parent input in the decision area of curriculum and instruction were united in their belief, and in their concern, that school personnel kept them poorly informed about matters of curriculum and instruction that affected their children. Parents felt uninformed and excluded from this key decision area. For many parents this represented the basis for their desire for a more substantive role. One parent expressed a commonly held sentiment when she stated:

> I think every parent who has a child in school deserves to know the kind of things the child is going to be learning over the course of the year . . . . I would like to have a little more insight in what to expect for the year, what direction they are going and the kinds of things they are going to be taking. It's important to me because we are involved with the kids, we help them if we can, it's just nicer to know the way they are going . . .

Lack of information was also the basis of this parent's concern:

> I think parents as a group should be consulted about any changes in the specific program within the school . . . . I don't think parents are given enough background information to be able to determine what the new program involves, how it might be an improvement on the old one, and whether we as a group should decide as a priority to push harder for the new program to be instigated.

While most parents were desirous of a more substantive role in relation to curriculum and instruction, a substantial minority were reticent of becoming involved or opposed to the notion of their own involvement or the involvement of others in curriculum-oriented questions. These parents felt that they lacked the necessary background and knowledge to make a worthwhile contribution or saw curriculum issues as properly reserved for professional educators. The reticence on the part of some parents was illustrated by this parent who commented:

> I would like to be asked my opinion more. I think parents should be asked their opinion more, even on what their children are being taught. But then again, what do we know about it, hey? These are the teachers, they are supposed to know. They took the training and they're getting paid to know.

Other parents were categoric in their belief that curriculum and instruction was an inappropriate area for parent involvement or participation. One parent who held that view contended:

> . . . the average parent, unless they have a degree in education or have been a teacher themselves, I don't think has any idea about curriculum, so why would they go and seek parent views on that?

Five of the six highly involved parent respondents were clearly supportive of a substantial role for parents in decision-making related to curriculum and instruction in their children's school.

Personnel Selection

Parents strongly supported the view that they should have the opportunity to be involved, or participate, in the selection of their school principal. This right was highly desired by parents. The principal was perceived as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of their local school and parents considered they had an important role to play in his or her selection. For two-thirds of the parent respondents such a role should embrace participation in the actual selection. For another group of parents the opportunity to be involved in the development of a role description or the identification of desirable personal qualities would suffice. In discussing their wish to be involved, parents often referred to the need for continuity in a school program and administration, and saw their involvement in the selection process as an invaluable way of helping to achieve this. In the words of one parent:

> I think I would like to be involved in that decision. Because after a school has been set up for a few years and it has been running in a certain way, it's an awful pity to have that changed.

For another parent, the involvement of parents in the selection of the next principal at his school had become almost a prerequisite for the continued effectiveness of the school and parent satisfaction with the school:

> . . . I feel that ____ [the principal] is the best and we don't want to have anything less. We want a principal that we can come in and talk to like we can with ____. . . . We don't want somebody who's going to make a lot of changes . . . . I'd hate to see it all go down the drain again.

The consequence of what parents saw as a poor choice of principal for their school was evident in the frustration expressed by this parent:

> . . . the principal is the man to whom you look to provide leadership, and if you've got the wrong man for the community, you're not going to get it, and I'm saying the wrong man for the community in terms of his objectives may be totally different to yours . . . , and maybe that's what we have . . .

Parent opposition to parents having a more influential role in the selection of their school principal was minimal. Opponents of that role were concerned that most parents lacked the necessary background to undertake such a role successfully. The fears of one parent were realized at her own local school. She reported:

> I can see what's happening over at this current school, and that is where I believe the man is being carried by the parents' group. I'm not saying he's a poor principal, but I haven't got any idea what kind of principal he is. He just seems to walk down the hall and all the parents say, "Bravo." I've never heard him express an opinion or do anything. And to me, that's a little scary . . .

Parents were less concerned to be involved in the selection of teachers, although a substantial proportion believed that parents should contribute in one way or another to the process. If parents did have a concern about teachers, it related to individuals who failed to meet parents' expectations. Parents indicated that the incompetent teacher constituted a source of frustration and tension and a number of parents referred to the need for formal parent input in such circumstances. One parent commented:

> The only place that a parent should get involved with that [teacher selection] is if they're not happy with a particular situation. Then certainly they'd better say something because if they don't, who will?

All parents categorized as highly involved supported a more substantial role for parents in the selection of the principal of their local school. Further, all but one of those parents saw a shared decision-making function as the appropriate mode of involvement for parents in the conduct of that task.

Financial Planning

Parents indicated their interest in being involved in the development of school expenditure priorities and the formulation of the school budget. A large majority of parents sought some form of involvement in the process and one half of all parent respondents indicated their support for a shared decision-making function. Parents generally recognized the centrality of budget decisions in the whole direction and approach of the school and saw their involvement in this area as important. Most parents were aware of the adoption and implementation of the concept of school-based budgeting by the Edmonton Public School Board in 1980. Parents were aware that fixed costs, especially teacher salaries, dominated the school budget and greatly limited the percentage of the budget available for discretionary spending. Yet the potential of this reform to gradually allow a school to reflect more precisely the particular preference and educational philosophy of the parents of children attending the school was clearly understood. For parents, the necessary condition was whether they could gain access to the decision-making process. One parent who sought more involvement in conjunction with more information commented:

> I would like to know just exactly where the money is spent . . . . I guess I would like to give it a try because I've seen them buy computers this year and I know they bought new library books and things like that, but I would have liked to have seen a few more musical instruments . . . , but it's hard to say because I don't know exactly how much money the school is allocated.

The limits of an advisory role are referred to by this parent who expressed his frustration when parent priorities were apparently disregarded:

> There's a source of frustration here now. We got funding in this school for an extended type of education project. It started out and there were super projects done and some super things going on, and all of a sudden it got watered down, and now we've still got this money but I think it's funding half of the library teacher or something. And there's a lot of dissatisfaction over that here because we liked that . . . and the parent teacher association went to enormous effort to get that funding here . . .

Parents agreed that their interest in school finance was in basic policy directions and decisions and not in the minute details of school spending. They were agreed that the contribution of parents should be in the development of school priorities and all discretionary expenditure leaving the school principal and staff to manage the details.

PARTICIPATION IN PARTICULAR DECISION AREAS: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Decision areas in which parents might appropriately have a more substantive role were discussed with professional educator respondents. Where spontaneous reference was not made by individual respondents to the general areas of curriculum and instruction, personnel selection and financial planning, responses were solicited by the researcher.

Curriculum and Instruction

Principals and teachers were unanimous in their conviction that any form of shared decision-making with parents in matters related to curriculum and instruction at the local school level would be inappropriate and undesirable. This area was identified as one central to the role and responsibilities of professional educators and, therefore, one in which professional educators should retain decision-making authority. It was contended that most parents lacked the training, the expertise and the background of experiences that would fit them to participate as equal members in a decision-making process in connection with curriculum and instruction. One principal commented:

> . . . you're not going to ask a person to make a decision if they don't have the tools, the information to make a good decision. Then I might as well go and pick up a coin and flip it because you have as much chance of coming up with a good decision.

Professional expertise was also at the core of the comments of the teacher who asserted:

> . . . I've been educated quite well, I've got experiences behind me. Knowledge, experience, whatever, put them all together. I feel I know a fair amount about how I should teach and what I should teach and I don't think I would be too keen on having parents tell me differently.

A number of principals and teachers were of the opinion that the system of provincial and district curriculum committees, which includes parent representatives, was sufficient provision for the input of parent opinion into the curriculum process. This view was taken by the principal who explained:

> . . . they [parents] are involved through the various system and provincial committees that establish the base. So basically what we're taking is the result of professional, parental and societal work and presenting it to the children.

Common reference was again made to the prescriptive curriculum regulations which operate in the province and the district. According to a number of principals and teachers, when school personnel themselves lack the authority to deviate from prescribed guidelines, any involvement of parents becomes quite improbable. One principal expressed a commonly held opinion when he observed:

> . . . we as professionals don't have a total say, so how can I give a parent in our community a say in terms of the curriculum when I as a principal don't have a say?

Teachers also saw the curriculum regulations as a limit to their capacity to entertain parent participation. One teacher commented:

> . . . there's certain kinds of things that have been laid down for us to teach which comes from Alberta Education through the Edmonton Public School system to us. Now until such time as they decide that those particular courses of study are not appropriate for certain grades . . . , we teach those.

While teachers and principals were firmly opposed to any form of shared decision-making with parents, more support for the right, and often the desirability, of parents' involvement in an advisory capacity was indicated. It was reported that involvement in such questions as the identification of school curriculum priorities, the makeup of the school program or the content of non-core curriculum programs was thought appropriate and welcome by most professional educators.

Strong opposition was expressed to any interference by parents in the methodological aspects of curriculum and instruction. Principals and teachers indicated that as trained professionals they reserved the right to make decisions concerning the way in which a particular curriculum was treated, about the most appropriate form of learning experiences for students, and about the way in which the students' learning environment was organized and structured. The comments of this teacher are reflective of the attitude expressed by professional educators as a group:

> . . . I don't want them [parents] having anything to say about my teaching strategies unless they feel they are harmful to the child. I think they're quite all right at a school level to say, "This is what we would like you to try and teach," or "we should stress this aspect." But once it gets down to the individual teacher's level in terms of classroom control and management and the teaching strategies, I think that's when they'd better back off.

Personnel Selection

A substantial majority of professional educator respondents indicated that in their view the participation, or at least the involvement, of parents in the process of selecting the principal and staff of their local school was neither inappropriate nor undesirable. A number of teachers drew attention to the fact, however, that they were not currently involved in the process. A condition of professional educators' support for the inclusion of parents in the process would be the inclusion of teachers on at least an equal basis with the parents.

There was widespread recognition that a school principal and staff should have a philosophy and personal characteristics which conform as closely as possible to the basic educational philosophy and expectations of the parents in the school community. Most principals and teachers expressed the view that one way of optimizing the fit between the school personnel and community expectations would be to ensure that parents played a substantive role in the selection process, especially of the school principal. One teacher expressed the view of many when he observed:

> Parents are pretty astute when it comes to things like that. They know the kind of person that they would like to see in charge of their school. Their child's going to be spending that much time in that school.

Almost half of all professional educators indicated the appropriateness of parents' participation in the personnel selection process in a shared decision-making capacity, and especially in the selection of the school principal.

Nearly one-third of the respondents saw the actual participation of parents in the selection process as inappropriate or unnecessary, but were supportive of their involvement in one form or another. Parents were seen to have the potential to advise policy-makers on the kind of person thought best suited to a position and the requisite characteristics thought necessary. A minority of professional educators indicated that they were definitely opposed to the involvement or participation of parents in the personnel selection process. These respondents indicated that parents lacked the necessary knowledge and background to make an appropriate contribution to the selection process. Three of the four school principals were adamant that the selection of staff was properly, and should remain, the prerogative of the principal. It was argued that the principal has the necessary professional background required to perform the task and that it was important that the staff reflect the basic philosophy and direction of the principal and the school. One principal explained his position this way:

> I feel that I, as a professional, have a better grasp of who I should select as a teacher than they [parents], non-professionals. How often has your lawyer phoned you and asked for advice? How often has your doctor consulted you about another case? . . . I mean it seems everyone is an expert when it comes to education.

Financial Management

Principals and teachers agreed concerning the appropriateness and desirability of some form of parent involvement, or participation, in the development of their local school budget. A substantial proportion of professional educator respondents, approximately one-third, reported that parents might properly be involved in the development of the budget of their local school on a shared decision-making basis with professionals. However, the current status of teachers in the operation of the school was again referred to in this context. Teachers perceived that, at best, they have an advisory function in school budget decisions, and that the inclusion of parents in the actual decision-making process would need to be accompanied by their own inclusion on at least an equal basis. Another group of professional educators was supportive of the concept of some form of parent involvement in discussion leading up to the development of the school budget.

In fact, respondents from all schools reported that parents already have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the school's budget. One principal described the formal procedure he used to garner parent opinion on school priorities:

> . . . we had a session with the parents where we went into small groups and looked at our programs and prioritized the program from their perspective.

Another principal used informal contacts with parents:

> . . . we do ask the parents in terms of the kinds of goals that we should be reaching for this year and we try to include those . . . where we can. That sort of opportunity is there.

PARTICIPATION DESIRED BUT DENIED: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 2.2. To what extent have parents been denied the opportunity to participate in specific issues in which they would have sought participation?

The incidence of issues in which parents would have expressed an opinion had they been given the opportunity to do so by school personnel was minimal. In fact, almost all parents reported that such an occasion had never occurred. Parents reported two reasons for this situation. For some parents the explanation has apparently been the singular absence of issues thought to be important enough to warrant parent contact with the school principal or staff. In the words of one such parent:

> In the six years that I have been involved in that school, there really hasn't been any issue that I haven't been involved in that I've wanted to. There doesn't seem to be any huge peaks and valleys at the school, we just sort of meander along.

For other parents, the lack of such issues was due mostly to their determination to communicate opinions to school personnel whenever this was judged to be necessary and regardless of whether that opinion had been solicited or not. As one parent explained:

> I am a strong person and if I feel strongly, I will make sure my opinion is heard if I think it is something that I think is important enough.

Another parent echoed those sentiments when she commented that, "If I want to express an opinion, I go and express it."

The only two issues identified by parents as issues in which they would have become involved had they been given the opportunity concerned bi-lingual programs. One of those issues involved the introduction of a new bi-lingual program in the school and was referred to by three parents from the school concerned. According to the parents, the decision to introduce the program was taken without consultation and announced as a fait accompli. One parent complained:

> . . . starting in September this school is going to have a ____ bi-lingual program, which to me seems totally senseless . . . in a school like that, that is supposed to be community-oriented. I think there should have been a little more community involvement to decide what programs we are going to implement into this school that will benefit all the children rather than a select few or bringing in a few from outside . . . . We got a newsletter that came home from school that said, "Starting in September . . . ." That was it, that was the first we were made aware of it.

However, none of the parents initiated any action designed to reverse the decision. One reason for the non-action is summarized by this parent who explained:

> . . . by the time I even heard about it the people setting up the program are already in place, the jobs are filled, they're getting paid, the program is half done now to start first week of next term . . . . I doubt that at this point we would have any results. Had we known the program was going on like that then I probably would have been involved at an earlier stage.

For another parent, however, the explanation for her non-action lay in the fact that the program was not compulsory. The key difference between an issue in which she would have liked to express an opinion prior to the decision being made and an issue important enough to actively take up was the perceived affect on her child.

SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT ROLE: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 2.3. How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

Parents of children attending elementary schools in the Edmonton Public School district have no formal decision-making role in the operation of their local school. Parents have reported that, in general, their input into the decision-making process in relation to their local school was infrequent and minimal. Parents have also reported that access was particularly limited in decisional areas parents defined as professional, the most commonly identified example of which was the area of curriculum and instruction. At the same time, parents have acknowledged the availability of direct lines of communication to school personnel should parents desire to initiate contact.

In reporting levels of overall satisfaction with their existing role in the operation of the school, some parents distinguished between what is and what might be; their satisfaction with the existing arrangements was qualified by a belief in the appropriateness and desirability of a more substantive role.

Parent Satisfaction

Parents were almost evenly divided in their reported levels of satisfaction with the nature and extent of their existing role in the operation of their local school. While slightly more than half of the parent respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the existing arrangements, slightly less than half were dissatisfied and sought a more substantive role. Statements made by parents concerning their satisfaction with their current role in the school are listed in Table 4.2.

Parents who were generally satisfied with their role almost always saw a link between that satisfaction and their evaluation of the performance of the school, expressed through their assessment of the principal and staff, the performance and happiness of their children as students, and parents' perception of the responsiveness of school personnel to parents' concerns and opinions.

Table 4.2

Satisfaction with Parents' Participation in School

Decisions: Statements of Parents

Satisfied	Not Satisfied
· A more substantial role would be inappropriate.	· *Only those with the knowledge and background should participate.
· Parents and professional educators have their respective roles.	· I am looking for a more influential role, especially in academic decision areas.
· While everything is O.K., I'm satisfied. And it is.	· *Certainly not, and the school should be responsive to my needs.
· *I am not dissatisfied but I would like a shared decision-making role.	· *Parents should have a substantial role in the school.
· I don't really approve of a more authoritative role for parents.	· I would like a stronger role, but I am hesitant to advocate one.
· I feel parents can already be influential.	· *I want to contribute more than input to decisions.
· For the time being I am satisfied. This is a good school.	· I am dissatisfied because I just cannot get anywhere with them [the principal and staff].
· The people doing it now are doing a good job.	· I would like to participate in decision-making, especially in the curriculum area.
· I would not oppose a greater role.	· *I would like a role with a share in decision-making even though I don't think it could work.
· The people and the situation here are good.	· I am not greatly dissatisfied, but I would like a greater role in some areas, especially curriculum.
· I am satisfied because of the people we have here.	
· I am satisfied because of the way the school is run.	
· I think we are already influential.	
· I am a strong person and I have made sure that my views are heard.	

* Highly involved parents.

Satisfaction and parent evaluation of school personnel. The relationship between parents' satisfaction with their current role and their assessment of the quality of school personnel was strong. Parents have expressed this relationship in a number of ways. One parent commented:

> I don't feel a need to actually take part in that process. Implicit in that reply is that I feel that the people who are doing it are capable of doing it, and they are probably capable of doing it better than I am . . . . I think it would be counter-productive for me to enter into that role . . .

A similar sentiment was evident in the comment of this parent:

> Presently yes, [I am satisfied] because of the way the school is run. Like I have no complaints about the school and I have no desire to change anything . . .

Satisfaction and children's progress. For many parents, the school performance and happiness of their children seemed inextricably tied to their satisfaction with their existing role in the operation of the school. One parent expressed a sentiment that was implicit in the comments of many other parents when he described his feelings:

> Satisfactory, really satisfactory . . . , because I'm satisfied with what is happening with my child . . . . I guess, basically, I take the school system for granted. My daughter leaves in the morning. She goes, she comes home, everything seems to be going swimmingly. God forbid that I ever come home and find that there are problems . . . . My child goes to learn, she seems to be learning very well . . . . She really enjoys it and that takes a big weight off your shoulders.

Satisfaction and the responsiveness of school personnel. Other parents have reported the importance of their perception that the school principal and staff are available and responsive to any concerns that parents might want to raise or opinions they might want to convey. The implication was that if parents felt free and welcome to approach the school at any time and were confident of a hearing and an appropriate response, their need and desire to become more substantively involved in the school decision-making process may be thereby diminished. One parent explained:

> I'm satisfied the way things are. If I'm not happy I know I can go over there, and if I have to go over every day for a week to get it rectified, I know I can do that too.

Satisfaction and Subjective Assessment

Parents often alluded to the temporary nature of satisfaction based on subjective, personal assessment of the quality of people and situations and indicated that as circumstances changed so might their level of satisfaction and their feelings concerning parent participation in school decision-making. As one parent commented:

> . . . unless there is something affecting my child, and thank goodness, right now we haven't had to become overconcerned with getting involved. Although, I could see where if that system of approaching the principal were to break down for whatever reason, if the problem were the principal and myself did not see eye-to-eye and so there was confrontation . . . ., that might be different.

Another parent also looked to the future and the possibility of different circumstances. She commented:

> For the time being I am satisfied because ____ is a well-run school and the teachers are good, the principal is good . . . , I haven't run up against anything so far, so for the time being it's good.

The same parent saw a different role for herself and other parents in the event that changed circumstances resulted in a decline in her general satisfaction with the school:

> Then I think I would see the parents get together to organize themselves to try to influence the school. I would think if we felt it necessary the parents would really do that.

Parent Dissatisfaction

There was also a substantial proportion of parents who expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the nature and extent of their existing role in the operation of their local school. For some of the parents this dissatisfaction stemmed from what they perceived as a denial of the regular opportunity at least to consult with professional educators regarding matters parents saw as central to the operation of the school, particularly curriculum-related issues. For other parents, dissatisfaction stemmed more from a conviction that parents have a right to an influential role in the way their children's school operates, and a belief that the current arrangements effectively prevented the exercise of that right. This position was clearly enunciated by the parent who stated:

> . . . traditionally the parent's role has been selling cookies, baking cookies and coming out to cheer at the ball games. To me that's not what school is all about

> at all. I think that the parents should have a very substantial role. They should be able to effect at least some changes in direction or provide some guidance as to where the school should be academically, . . . and I think the school should be particularly responsive to the community they're in . . .

However, there was little suggestion that these parents desired or advocated parent control of the school. Rather, they wanted to feel they could contribute to important decisions which affected their children. While most of the parents who reported dissatisfaction with their current role in the school supported a shared decision-making structure involving parents and professional educators in key areas of the school's operation, invariably, participation was sought in decisions concerning general and broad policy issues and not in the minute details concerning the day-to-day operation of the school. For some dissatisfied parents the provision for the regular and systematic input of their opinion into key areas of the school's operation would suffice providing parents' felt the school personnel to be receptive to their views and concerns.

SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT ROLE: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Principals and teachers reported a high level of satisfaction with the existing role of parents in the operation of the school. The high level of satisfaction is evident in the list of professional educators' statements concerning the current role of parents in the school presented in Table 4.3.

Principals and teachers agreed concerning the desirability of greater parent involvement in the school. This comment by one teacher summarized the view of many:

> I'd like to see more parents able to come in and help out. The more heads put together on a problem, the better, the more solutions.

One principal expressed a similar sentiment:

> . . . I would like more involvement, I think, to get more parents out to a meeting or as volunteers in the school. I don't think you can have enough of them. We could certainly use more in volunteer work like tutoring.

However, little need was seen to increase the level of parent participation in school decision-making.

Professional educators contended that, in fact, parents exerted considerable influence in the decision-making process and that school personnel consciously did all possible to accommodate parent demands and opinion. It was suggested that the current informal arrangements that had been successful in the past were preferable to a formal, legally-mandated system that could result in the introduction of tensions that do not currently exist.

The high level of professional satisfaction with the existing involvement of parents in the decision-making process was predicated on two conditions: the perceived high level of parent support for the school and the availability of a variety of channels by which parents could communicate and exert influence on decision-makers.

Table 4.3

Satisfaction with Parent Participation in School Decisions.

Summary Statements: Professional Educators.

Satisfied	Not Satisfied
. (P) Parents should confine their attempts to influence to existing channels.	. Parents should have a more substantial role.
. If role changed, we would need strict and clear lines of demarcation.	. I would like to see parents more involved in actual decision-making.
. Maybe they [parents] could have more influence on the physical side, the facility.	. Parents have lots to contribute.
. The School Board provides adequate parent representation.	
. We are the professionals. They [parents] exert enough influence already.	
. I would like to see more involvement.	
. (P) I would like to see more involvement, but I am satisfied with the level of participation.	
. (P) Parents exert reasonable influence now.	
. The existing informal arrangements are working well.	
. (P) We consult parents and consider their opinions.	
. There are other ways but the climate here is warm and accepting.	
. The school is running well. Things happen. But there's a lot of untapped potential.	
. They can come in and make a statement if they want to.	
. If the role was carefully defined I would not be unhappy to see it enlarged.	
. Parents make a lot of decisions already.	
. I would like more involvement in support of the school.	
. If the role was changed the representation would have to be broader.	

(P) Principal.

SATISFACTION WITH THE CURRENT ROLE OF PARENTS: A SYNTHESIS

Parents have reported that, in general, their role opportunities in their children's school are limited. Their role was perceived to have a service and support bias and their involvement in the school decision-making process to be infrequent and generally confined to decision areas peripheral to the central purpose of the school. In general, professional educators concurred with that perception. However, most professional educators and more than half of the parent respondents indicated general satisfaction with the current role and influence of parents in their children's school. On the other hand, nearly half of the parents reported dissatisfaction with their current role opportunities. Further, important differences in emphasis are evident in the attitudes of the two groups towards the role of parents in the school.

Parents and Key Areas of Decision-Making

Areas of basic agreement were evident between parents and professional educators concerning the role parents might appropriately play in key areas of school decision-making. Important differences in emphasis were also evident. Table 4.4 summarizes the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in particular areas of school decision-making and indicates the frequency of preferred roles for parents in selected areas of school decision-making.

Table 4.4

The Role of Parents in Selected Areas of School Decision-Making

Selected Areas of School Decision-Making	Parents. Preferred Role			Professional Educators. Preferred Role		
	SDM	ADV	NO ROLE	SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
School curriculum priorities; broad curriculum content.	7	10	7	2	9	9
Teaching methodology; class organization and management; structure and organization of learning experiences.	0	13	7	0	4	16
Selection of school principal.	*16	5	3	9	6	5
Selection of school staff members.	10	11	3	6	9	5
Development of school expenditure priorities and formulation of the budget.	12	8	4	7	11	2

* Means 16 parent respondents preferred a shared decision-making role in the selection of the school principal.

SDM Shared Decision-Making

ADV Advisory

Professional educators generally expressed grave reservations about the participation of parents in the school decision-making process. While there was some professional educator support for parent involvement in an advisory capacity, there was only minimal support for their participation in decision-making. Strong opposition was expressed to parent participation in decisions relating to curriculum and instruction. Indeed, parent interference of any kind was strongly opposed concerning issues related to such areas as methodology, class control and management or the organization and structure of childrens' learning experiences. On the other hand, professional educators generally were not opposed to the involvement of parents in an advisory capacity in issues related to school curriculum priorities and program content, especially in the non-core curriculum areas.

Most parents reported that they were offered access only to certain decision areas and specifically denied access to others, particularly to the general area of curriculum and instruction. In the general area of curriculum and instruction most parents felt they were given too little information by professional educators and expressed a desire for a more substantive role. Some parents, approximately one-third, advocated a shared decision-making function as the most appropriate mode of involvement. Another third of the parent respondents would be satisfied with the opportunity for regular input into decisions relating to curriculum and instruction, particularly decisions related to program content and basic methodological issues. Parents sought entry to a decision area most now considered closed to them. They sought, at least, some input into general policy and methodological issues, not the minute details of day-to-day operation.

Basic differences exist in the way the two groups defined the curriculum and instruction area. Professional educators tended to define this area as one which was central to their professional task in the school and, therefore, one properly within their decision-making authority. Parents, however, saw decisions pertaining to curriculum and instruction as central to the quality of the educational experiences of their children and one in which they were entitled, at least, to detailed information and the opportunity to contribute to decisions that are made.

Strong parent support was indicated for some form of substantial parent involvement in the selection of the school principal. Over half of all respondents sought a shared decision-making function in that process. Strong parent support was also indicated for, at least, substantive parent involvement in the selection of school staff. Parents indicated a high level of support, also, for their involvement in the development of the school budget. One-half of the parent respondents sought a shared decision-making role in that process.

Most professional educators were prepared to share decision-making authority, or have parents involved, in personnel selection. In the budget development process, however, the most preferred parent role was an advisory one. Only one-third of professional respondents saw a shared decision-making role as appropriate for parents.

It is evident that professional educators in general, conceived a role for parents in relation to key areas of the operation of the school that was essentially advisory in orientation. While some professional educator respondents indicated their support for some form of shared decision-making function for parents, the majority were firmly opposed to that concept, particularly in the decision area of highest saliency for professional educators -- the general area of curriculum and instruction.

Parents, however, were not unanimous in their desire for a shared decision-making role with professionals. While more than half of the parent respondents indicated their desire for a shared decision-making function in the areas of personnel selection and school budget development, only one-third desired such a role in the area of curriculum and instruction. For many parents the opportunity to contribute in key areas of decision-making on a regular and systematic basis, and in response to requests for input from school personnel, would suffice. In this sense, the basic objective of many parents conforms with the role professional educators conceived as most appropriate for parents in the school decision-making process. Parents were not interested in taking over control of the school. They did, however, seek a role which would allow them to contribute as valued, if not equal, partners in decisions they viewed as important for the educational experiences of their children.

Satisfaction with the Current Role

Parents were almost equally divided in their reported satisfaction with the nature of their current role and with the extent of their participation in school decision-making. Slightly more than half the parent respondents reported general satisfaction with the existing arrangements. In almost all cases, parents' satisfaction was linked to feelings of satisfaction with the school principal and staff, with the progress of their children at school, and with parents' confidence in the receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel to individual parent concerns or needs. However almost half the parent respondents were less than satisfied with their current role. For these parents, the perceived lack of access to important areas of decision-making or a belief that their right to participate in key decisions affecting the education of their children was effectively denied by the current arrangements formed the basis of their dissatisfaction.

Principals and teachers were almost unanimous in reporting their satisfaction with the existing role of parents in the school and with the extent of parent participation in the school decision-making process. They contended that parents already exerted considerable influence, that the current arrangements were sufficient and satisfactory for most parents and that there was no need to alter the existing relationship.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, findings have been presented and discussed relating to parent and professional educator perceptions of the role of parents in their local school and the reported satisfaction expressed with that role and the extent of parent participation in the school decision-making process. In concluding the chapter the main findings are emphasized and some emergent themes are discussed in the context of the findings.

The Nature of the Current Role

Parents, in general, perceived their role in the school to be largely peripheral to the main task of the school. The dominant components of their role were identified as activities oriented towards the provision of services to school personnel and support of school activities. Parents reported only minimal involvement in key areas of the operation of their school. Their input into the decision-making process was seen as limited to the less important areas and, even then, opportunities to contribute were infrequent. Decisional areas central to the educational experiences of their children were generally felt to be closed to parents' input. An important example was the area of curriculum and instruction, one in which parents felt they were given too little information and effectively excluded from the decision-making process.

Many parents defined the general approach of school personnel as reactive rather than proactive; in general, their opinion was unlikely to be sought prior to decisions being taken. Parents felt strongly that the initiative in conveying their opinions and concerns to school personnel rested largely with parents. They acknowledged that school personnel were accessible and willing to meet them for this purpose at any time.

Principals and teachers reported a perception of the current role of parents in the school that largely corresponded with the perception of parents. They reported that most parent involvement was in the form of service and support activities for the school. Most teachers also confirmed that parents' input was often not solicited by school personnel prior to decisions being taken and that opinion was seldom solicited in the most important decision-making areas. Professional educators generally differentiated between decision areas they defined as professional, those intimately related to their professional role, and non-professional, decision areas peripheral to the professional role, in relation to the appropriateness of parent participation in the school decision-making process.

Professional educators confirmed that much of the initiative for the communication of parents' opinions to school personnel was taken by parents but that they were open, accessible and willing to receive such communication, and did consider parents' opinion in making decisions related to the operation of the school.

In general, then, parents were perceived to have a limited role in the operation of their children's school, at least in an explicit sense. They have no formal decision-making function in the school, their involvement in the decision-making process was acknowledged to be limited, infrequent and uneven and often confined to decision areas far removed from the educational experiences of their children, and their most common functions in the school were largely service and support oriented.

Satisfaction with the Role

2

Parents generally acknowledged that their current role in their local school was a limited one. Despite the limitations of the role, over half of the parent respondents reported general satisfaction with the nature of the role and their participation in the decision-making process. So did almost all professional educator respondents.

Parents' satisfaction with the nature of their current role was clearly related to positive judgments concerning one or more of: (1) the quality of the school principal and staff, (2) the progress and welfare of their children at school, and (3) parents' confidence in the accessibility, receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel to their individual needs and concerns.

The quality of the school principal and staff. Parents made a judgment relating to the overall effectiveness of the school largely by their assessment of the quality of the school principal and staff. While usually resorting to subjective criteria, the judgment was made nonetheless. On the basis of this judgment parents seemed to be more or less satisfied with the school and with their own role in the school. The more positive the assessment of the quality of the principal and staff, the less likely were parents to feel the need for a more authoritative function in the operation of the school and the more content they were to leave substantive decision-making to others.

The progress and welfare of their children. Judgments made concerning the progress and welfare of their children at school related to parents' satisfaction with their role in the school in several ways. A parent's felt need to communicate with the school principal or a staff member and their satisfaction with the existing means of communciation were both related to the parent's perception of the progress and welfare of their children at school. In general, the better the perceived progress, and the lower the perceived problem level, the less the felt need to communicate with the school and the higher the satisfaction with existing means of conveying opinion and concerns.

A similar relationship was indicated concerning parents' satisfaction with their existing role and participation in school decision-making. While their children were perceived to be making good progress, and were happy and contented at school, parents in general, were more likely to be content with their existing role and the need for a more authoritative role was diminished.

Receptivity and responsiveness. There was also an apparent relationship between a parent's perception of the accessibility, receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel to their individual concerns and needs and parents' satisfaction with their current role.

Satisfied parents reported high confidence in the accessibility and receptivity of school personnel to their advances. Most parents felt confident in approaching the school principal or a staff member when it was deemed necessary or desirable to do so. Parents were confident that they would be given a warm and cordial reception and receive a fair hearing. Most parents also reported that they perceived the school principal and staff to be responsive to their concerns and needs. That is, if the need to act did arise, most parents were confident that some action would result on the part of school personnel. Most dissatisfaction with their current role was expressed by parents of children attending a school where the principal and staff were perceived to be unresponsive to the expressed concerns of parents.

The dynamic character of satisfaction. Parents who reported satisfaction with their current role based that satisfaction largely on their subjective assessment of existing school situations. It is likely, then, that if the situation was perceived to change causing satisfaction to decline, so might parents' satisfaction with their current role and influence be expected to change, possibly leading to desires for a more authoritative role in the operation of the school. Several parents alluded to that possibility.

Propensity to participate in the school decision-making process, then, could be conceived as a function of parents' satisfaction with particular aspects of the school. Further, the changing nature of school situations could result in the propensity to participate having a dynamic character. The parents who reported dissatisfaction with their current role were also dissatisfied with particular aspects of the school's operation. In particular, some parents perceived a lack of responsiveness on the part of school personnel to their concerns. Other dissatisfied parents resented what they defined as their exclusion from decision-making areas central to the quality of their children's education.

The Desired Role

Many parents clearly sought a more substantive role in the operation of their local school. A substantial proportion of parents saw a shared decision-making function as the most appropriate form of involvement. Many parents, however, indicated that a regular and systematic opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process in areas they considered to be central to the operation of their local school would suffice. Parents would like to be consulted. Many parents did not resent the service and support component of their role but were aware of the limitations of a role confined almost solely to service and support activities, and desired the opportunity to contribute to policy decisions intimately related to the education of their children.

It was evident that parents sought not to take over control of the school but, rather, sought a role in decisions related to major policy issues, whole-school priorities and directions, and not in the minute and intimate details of school organization and management. Implicit in the role desired by parents is that they wish to be consulted more often, that their opinions be more highly regarded by professional educators, especially in so-called professional areas, and that less of the responsibility for conveying their opinion be left with parents.

Most professional educators opposed the concept of shared decision-making with parents. While a minority, approximately one-third of respondents, have indicated the appropriateness of the concept of shared decision-making, most educators identified an advisory role as far more appropriate.

It is evident that the salience of particular decision areas varies for professional educators. A distinction was made between professional and non-professional areas of decisions, but in an imprecise way. There was little disagreement, however, that decisions within the general area of curriculum and instruction have a high salience for professional educators, and this was one area in which professional educators, were most reluctant to accept parent participation. Most parents made no such distinction between professional and non-professional decisions. Rather, most parents defined decisions in terms of their relationship to the quality of education received by their children, and saw their involvement, even participation, as appropriate and justified on that basis.

Professional educators, while often indicating support for a more regular and systematic advisory role for parents, nevertheless, stressed the service and support component of the parents' role in considering even a possible future role for parents. By so-doing, a basic difference in the values and beliefs of the two groups was underlined.

Highly Involved Parents

Parents classified as highly involved for the purpose of the study are parents with current or recent past executive experience on the parent advisory group in either of the two schools with a formal advisory structure.

In relation to the key decision areas addressed, highly involved parents were consistent advocates of an authoritative role for parents in the school decision-making process, and were generally strong advocates of a shared decision-making function as the most appropriate form of involvement. Highly involved parents were clearly dissatisfied with the existing nature of their role in the school and with the extent of their participation in the school decision-making process and were almost unanimous in their belief that parents should have a more authoritative role in the operation of their children's school.

CHAPTER 5

ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION AND RELATED FACTORS

In this chapter findings related to Research Problem 3 will be presented and discussed. Research Problem 3 reads:

> What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and what factors are related to those attitudes?

Parent and professional educator attitudes are reported in the hypothetical context of the existence of a form of shared decision-making between parents and professional educators at the local school level. The concept adopted for the purpose of the study was of one or other form of representative structure involving the school principal and representatives of the school staff and parents of children attending the school. Such a body would have a decision-making function in all key areas of the school's operation.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 3.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward parent participation in local school decision-making?

Parents were almost equally divided in their reported support, or non-support, for the concept of sharing decision-making authority with professional educators in the operation of their local school. While slightly more than half the parent respondents indicated general support for the concept of shared decision-making, slightly less than half saw this mode of involvement as unnecessary, inappropriate or undesirable. Highly involved parents were uniform in their reported support for the concept of shared decision-making authority with professional educators. Five of six highly involved parents saw such a procedure as appropriate and desirable. Five of the six parent respondents from the school where there was tension between professional educators and parents indicated their support for a procedure which would allow them to have a shared decision-making role with the principal and staff. Yet, there was a degree of hesitancy evident among parent respondents in general about the concept of sharing decision-making with professional educators at the local school level. Often, parents' comments implied support for the concept in theory while they expressed reluctance or opposition to it in practice. No parents indicated unqualified support for shared decision-making related to the operation of their local school. All conceived certain dangers, necessary conditions, or limits required if such a concept were to be adopted. Parents who indicated support for the concept often did so on balance and were sometimes as hesitant as parents who, also on balance, declared their lack of support. Highly involved parents were no less hesitant than the parent sample as a whole.

There is no recent tradition of parent participation in local school decision-making in the Edmonton Public School district. In qualifying their support, or lack of support, a number of parents made reference to the role of traditional practice in limiting individual awareness of what was possible or even desirable. One parent verbalized thoughts implicit in the comments of other parents when she spoke of the difficulty experienced in conceptualizing a shared decision-making structure. She found it difficult:

> . . . because it's new to us, and it's a way that we haven't really considered the possibilities . . .

Another parent alluded to a similar feeling:

> I've never experienced other than what I've been used to and I was a beginner when I went in. I just don't know how it would work here.

ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

A clear majority of professional educators expressed their opposition to the concept of a shared decision-making role between professional educators and parents at the local school level. Fourteen of the twenty professional educator respondents reported that in their opinion such a role for parents was unnecessary or inappropriate.

All four school principals were opposed to any form of shared decision-making in key areas of school operation. One principal, in commenting upon an organizational structure that incorporated a sharing of decision-making authority between professional educators and parents, asked:

> Why would you want to do that? You train people to perform that function, you pay people to perform that function and now you're going to add another element in there, and in some cases an uninformed element, to make decisions of that import.

Another principal expressed the intensity of his feelings:

> . . . I, as principal, would not be involved in that. I would just say, "To Hell with it." I feel that what we do here is good. I feel that we have a lot of parents' input, with no vote, we have a lot of staff input with no vote . . . , and if it's perceived that the direction in which this school is going is not in the best interest of the student population, then it's up to the Board to do something about it.

Respondents from all four schools expressed their lack of support for a shared decision-making role with parents in key areas of decision-making. In addition, four teachers who were themselves supportive of a shared decision-making concept also believed that professionals as a group would oppose the concept. All five respondents from the school where a state of tension existed between professional educators and parents expressed their opposition to any substantive sharing of decision-making authority with parents.

A minority of teachers who opposed the shared decision-making concept felt very strongly about the matter. One teacher who was strongly opposed to the concept declared:

> . . . I would feel that there would be some decisions that I felt I should make, or together with the principal make in the running of that school . . . , if the parents made a decision that I didn't agree with . . . , I would have no alternative but to resign.

Most teachers were more moderate in their opposition. Many saw a potential role for parents in an advisory capacity but were reluctant to agree to a shared decision-making function for parents. The feelings expressed by this teacher reflected the views of others:

> I think it would be great if they [parents] would give me feedback on what they think is appropriate . . . . I would be a little distressed if some person came off the street and said, "I want it taught that way" . . . , without any guidelines it would come to that . . . , then I could see them really spoiling the teaching profession because a lot of good teachers would just pack it in.

Six of the sixteen teacher respondents were not opposed to the concept of sharing decision-making authority with parents. While all of those teachers recognized and acknowledged the possible disadvantages of such a procedure, on balance, it was agreed that the likely benefits -- to the school, to the children, and to their parents, would outweigh potential problems. One teacher summarized the view of other supporters of shared decision-making when he explained:

> . . . parents would, when they say they're satisfied with the school, would really be satisfied . . . , because they had seen the inner workings of the school. It's no longer a strange thing. They would understand the problems we have . . . . And I think parents would see the school as a place where they want to send their children . . . , because they've been involved in setting up the program and the sorts of activities that the school offered.

FACTORS RELATED TO ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 3.2. What factors are related to parents' and professional educators' attitudes toward parent participation in local school decision-making?

Analysis of the data related to parents' attitudes toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making revealed the existence of a range of factors which seem to have been related to those attitudes. The factors were: (1) the qualifications of parents, (2) the role of parents and professional educators, (3) the adequacy of representation, and (4) toward shared decision-making.

In discussing their attitudes toward parent participation in local school decision-making, an underlying concern was indicated with what parents perceived as the lack of information conveyed to them by school personnel related to the nature of the school educational program, the progress of their children at school, and decisions made in relation to the operation and administration of the school. For many parents this paucity of information constituted a major deficiency in the nature of their relationship with the school. While the feelings of being under-informed did not always promote strong support for a shared decision-making role for parents, it was the basis for a widespread desire for a more influential role for parents. Plainly, many parents felt they were given too little information about their local school and they desired much more. As one parent complained:

> . . . you don't know how the school functions, how a school operates . . . . We can walk in there virtually any time we want . . . , but as for how the school actually runs . . .

The Qualifications of Parents

Over half the parent respondents made spontaneous reference to at least one aspect of parents' qualifications to successfully undertake a shared decision-making role in the operation of their local school. Parents referred to the level of parents' interest in participating, to the perceived level of expertise necessary to perform the role, and to the nature of parents' perspective in relation to the operation of their local school.

Parent interest in participation. Parent respondents expressed doubt about the extent to which parents in general would be interested in participation in a program of shared decision-making with professional educators in the operation of their local school. Parents who saw themselves as involved in the activities of the school were often critical of parents at large who were commonly perceived as lazy, apathetic, or disinterested in the education of their children and unwilling to contribute to the well-being of their children's school. Reference was often made to the small percentage of parents who were active supporters of their school and to a perception that the involved parents carried the burden year after year. Even the possibility of a more authoritative role for parents was judged to be unlikely to significantly alter that trend. One parent expressed her doubt in this way:

> I'm sure it would be the 100 parents that have always done it. We would still run this, we would still do the little things at the school, we would still be the ones that complained, we would still be the ones that said something was O.K. Unless the attitude of parents changes a great deal when they are allowed to make decisions.

On the other hand, parents who judged themselves to be involved in the school and interested in their children's education were often seen as much more likely to be interested in the opportunity to participate. One parent summarized the views of other parents when she commented:

> I think 90% of them [parents] would probably ignore the whole scene, but I think the ones that are involved would be very glad that there was some formal method.

Another parent, who described the parents at her school as highly interested in their children's education, also differentiated between those parents and parents in general. She observed:

> I think the parents in the school that I'm concerned with would welcome it [shared decision-making]. I think they would see that as a tremendous step forward in coming together with the school and their children.

Knowledge and expertise of parents. Parents agreed that in order to perform a shared decision-making role effectively the parents involved would need an appropriate knowledge-base, level of expertise, and range of background experiences. In general, parent respondents expressed a doubt that most parents were adequately prepared to undertake such a role. As one parent observed, "I wouldn't like some of the people I know making decisions." The lack of an adequate knowledge-base of most parents also concerned the parent who commented:

> . . . in order that [shared decision-making] be a success you need parents who are knowledgeable. There's no sense in having a group like this if you have to retrain your parents . . .

A distinction has often been made or implied between parent respondents' capacity to serve and the capacity of parents in general. One highly involved parent reflected a common feeling when she commented:

> Well for people like me I think it would be O.K., but for some I don't think so. From working those two years with parents [as Chairman of the Parents' Advisory Committee] and finding out what they [parents] were like, I think it would be horrendous, I really do.

Parent perspective. Parents reported that a successful shared decision-making structure would also depend upon the ability of the parents involved to take a whole-school perspective in their deliberations on school policy matters. Most parents acknowledged the primacy of the progress and welfare of their own children as basic motivation for their involvement in the school. This parent summarized what was a commonly expressed view:

> It's very difficult to have a broad outlook . . . . You're really only concerned with your child. I think if we're very honest we don't really want to know about all the other things.

Concern was expressed by a number of parents about the extent to which parents in general were capable of stepping outside the focus upon their children's interests and adopting the necessary broader perspective, and about how objective they would be in a decision-making role. One parent expressed his concern this way:

> I think we tend to have a bird's-eye view as parents. We are looking down this one long, narrow path and not taking into consideration the other factors that teachers and staff are dealing with. We're looking at this one aspect whereas the teachers have to consider

> the student, they have to consider other teachers, they have to consider the parents, where we as parents don't. And I think that makes a difference as to the way a decision goes.

One parent provided what she saw as an illustration of parents' lack of objectivity and individual-child orientation when she commented upon her attendance at a meeting of parents called to discuss the termination of a second-language program:

> . . . every parent thinks that the particular program that their child is in is the most important , . . . At the meeting the comments from some of those parents were absolutely crazy and it became emotionally charged . . . . I think back to that evening I went to and some of the comments were just unbelievable for so-called thinking people because all they could see was their own particular little program. They had no overview of what might be best for the system.

Parent-Professional Educator Relationships

There were indications that parents' attitudes toward their participation in local school decision-making were predicated upon the assumed existence of a right and proper relationship between parents and professional educators.

The need to be heard. Parents again emphasized that their opinion was seldom solicited by school personnel in matters parents defined as important in the education of their children and the operation of the school. Most parents would appreciate an indication that professional educators valued their opinion more and, accordingly, sought parent opinion on a more regular and systematic basis.

The limits to participation. Parents saw appropriate limits to the extent to which they should participate in local school decision-making. There was common agreement that parents should not participate in all aspects of school decision-making. Many parents distinguished between what they saw as decisions involving fundamental change or major policy decisions in relation to educational programs or school operation and the multitude of minor day-to-day decisions in which they expected nor sought no part. One parent expressed a common sentiment when she stated:

> . . . I think that we have to stay away from the day-to-day running of the school. You couldn't have a principal running to the committee every time he wanted to make a minor decision . . . , [to] consult a higher authority every time you try and make a basic decision . . . , but on some of the more controversial things, the major issues . . . . I think it would be nice to have a committee which would have some kind of involvement.

Parents saw the need for some degree of final authority in the management and operation of the school to rest with the school principal and staff. This view was reported by supporters of a shared decision-making function for parents as well as parents who saw that function as less appropriate. Implicit in the view was a recognition of, and respect for, professional status in the parent-professional educator relationship. As one parent commented:

> . . . these people [professional educators] have been trained, they know what's going on . . . , they know what's needed and what to do about it.

The need for professional educator authority was also suggested by the parent who stated:

> I think you can only have one leader in a school. I think he has to be open to input from parents, and to be open to positive and negative criticism and ideas, but in the end he has to decide what the needs of the children in his care are and how he is going to meet those needs.

Implicit in the concept of the professional educator as final decision-maker in the day-to-day operation of the school was the notion that professional educators had a task to perform and, within limits, they should be permitted to perform that task with as little interference as possible. As one parent put it:

> . . . I would say that it's a shared responsibility. That [operating the school] is their responsibility, and I feel as long as they pull their end of the bargain they really don't need my advice on things.

The same idea was expressed by the parent who commented:

> . . . I still feel there are decisions to be made by the school and there's decisions to be made at home . . . . I feel that we're paying them to do their job, just the same as I don't want someone to come in here and say that you're not being a proper mum.

Underlying the recognition of an area of professional educator decision-making discretion was a widespread belief in the primacy of professional expertise.

Professional expertise. Most parents recognized the professional expertise of educators and acknowledged that expertise as an important reason to limit parents' participation in local school decision-making. Parent supporters of a more authoritative and influential role for parents were no less likely to recognize and acknowledge expertise than were parents who reported no need for a change to the existing relationship. Education was held in high esteem by parent respondents and educational practitioners were generally seen to possess the skills and expertise which are particular to their professional task and which constitutes the basis for a distinction between professional educators and parents. One parent described his feelings this way:

> I think probably where something as important as education is concerned that the people involved in selecting the subjects, in selecting the teaching method, should be as professional as teachers and professionals are.

Another parent who reported his reliance upon the skills and expertise of professional educators commented:

> As a parent who isn't involved with an education program as part of my working experience, I have a tough time having an opinion about a core subject, the value of it. I would like to be presented with alternatives [by professional educators].
>
> I'm relying on experts to tell me that certain things will make my child an adaptable individual, and over the course of his schooling there will be a progression, not an overlapping, but a progression of teaching experience . . .

Parents, in general, were also confident that most school principals and teachers were diligent in the performance of their professional task and competent in the execution of that task. The comments of this parent are typical of most other parents:

> I think they have a handle on the program, they have a handle on the new teaching methods and that's their job, and hopefully all of them do it to the best of their ability. The ones that I've been in contact with certainly do.

The Adequacy of Representation

Parent respondents were often concerned that elected representatives on a shared decision-making body in the school might not, in fact, be representative of parents in general. This concern was referred to by almost half of the parent respondents in discussing their attitude towards parent participation in school decision-making. One parent verbalized doubts about the viability of representative decision-making which were implicit in the comments of other parents:

> I suspect that there is a fairly negative attitude about representatives here, and now I'm going to reflect that. I would have to be convinced of the ability of those parents to represent me. I wouldn't assume that. I do so far as the teachers go . . . , but as far as the parents go, no, I would like that to be shown.

Concern was expressed that the same parents would dominate the shared decision-making process, though for different reasons. Parents perceived to be involved themselves referred again to what they saw as the small percentage of parents who were currently involved in the activities of the school. The advent of shared decision-making was regarded as unlikely to reverse that situation. As one highly involved parent commented:

> We have meetings and 35 parents show up . . . , so unless there was a lot more parental input into the thing, it [the representative structure] would be controlled by the ones that wanted, that were willing to participate.

A similar view was expressed by the parent who saw a shared decision-making structure as being dominated by the same people who were elected to other representative boards:

> . . . the most outspoken or the most popular type of people would probably be elected . . . , the people

> who tend to get involved would probably be the people who would get onto a committee of that sort.

Other parents also forecast the dominance of highly involved parents, but for a different reason. One parent believed that:

> . . . the same people would vie for that position they have held for so many years . . . . I have seen it now for a few years in this community. It hurts to see that happen, where a certain bunch of people will continually be on that [advisory committee].

This position was also reflected by other parents who spoke of the dangers of small group domination of a shared decision-making body. One parent worried by that prospect suggested:

> I think there are always the vocal leaders, and I think that this is a danger . . . , they maybe have off the tangent interests and they can convince others. It's true that a delegation of 20 people, with their little banner or something, can effect that change . . .

Another highly involved parent supported that belief when she warned:

> . . . some parents are extremely gifted in this area. They are very good at finding out how to get into the system and [exert] influence . . . . I think that would be one thing that would have to be guarded against, is having a small, tiny group of parents who are very influential . . .

Other parents had a different concern. They were more worried that selected parents would lack the knowledge and background to perform the task effectively. A highly involved parent declared her position when she commented:

> I think that if you have informed, responsible parents that have a background, that know what they're talking about, then yes, it's [shared decision-making] fine. But one thing that really scares me is very vocal, loud, unknowledgeable people having a role in the decision-making process.

Towards Shared Decision-Making

Parents conceptualized the achievement of shared decision-making status in the school as the end point in a developmental process. There was a clear indication that parents saw an advisory role as a necessary, or certainly desirable, first step before attaining shared decision-making status. The desirability of incremental changes in the role of parents was referred to by highly involved parents and parents not classified as highly involved. One parent whose child attended a school without a formal advisory structure saw parents' current lack of knowledge and information about the operation of the school as a major barrier to an immediate shared decision-making status. He argued that to participate effectively:

> . . . you have to know enough to ask an intelligent question in the first place. And I think that probably would have to be the first step. That there would have to be sufficient information for the masses for them to intelligently say. So it would be a real information transferral initially. [That] would have to be a first stage . . . . To step in as a decision-making body would be very difficult.

The notion of a developmental process was also implicit in the view expressed by two of the three highly involved parents from one school who expressed doubt that the community as a whole was ready for a shared decision-making role in the schools. One of these parents distinguished between his community, which he felt was prepared to assume such a role, and most other communities which were felt to lack adequate preparation. Rather, he sought an incremental approach whereby parents would gradually assume a more influential and authoritative role as they gained experience and knowledge:

> Yeah, I would like to see it beefed up boy . . . , but why can't it be done incrementally? . . . I would take a lot of convincing Edmonton is ready for it on a general basis . . .

The second, also highly involved, parent from the same school included his own community in his perceptions of a general state of unreadiness. He commented:

> Happily we are not in a situation where the things we've talked about here would be suggested for the ____ school next year. I don't think there are any parents who are sufficiently prepared to act objectively and really do a great job . . . , it would have to be a very carefully structured growing experience.

The Need for a Formal Structure

In discussing their attitude towards participation in school decision-making the value and desirability of a formal, representative structure to communicate parents' opinion and concerns to school personnel was often referred to. In excess of one-third of all parent respondents made spontaneous reference to the value of some formal structure through which parent opinion and concerns could be channeled to school personnel in a more regular and systematic way. Highly involved parents were the most consistent, though not the only, advocates of the need for some formal structure to represent parents. Commenting on the need to formalize the process of parent input into school policy decisions, a highly involved parent said:

> Informal is just to me what it sounds like. You can either take it or leave it, and if it happens to correlate with what the principal feels should be

> happening, fine . . . , but on decisions where say the principal has his feelings about it and the parents feel the other way, then if you have a formal method, then you can go past the principal . . .

Another highly involved parent suggested that a formal structure was needed to:

> . . . routinize your [parents] complaints and wishes and so on and, even if they [professional educators] don't do what you want as a parent, you've at least had the opportunity to express them somewhere . . . , and I think it would tend to give decisions that people could live with more easily.

One highly involved parent, in speaking of the need for some kind of formal structure, introduced the notion of the relative interest of communities in participation. He argued:

> . . . if you function in an area where there is interest and a lot of desired involvement on the part of the parents, then there should be some mechanism by which the school has to respond to that directive.

Parent Willingness to Serve

Parents were almost unanimous in their reported willingness to serve as a parent representative on a shared decision-making body with professional educators. While parents expressed doubts about their individual capacity or the perceived viability of such a concept, strong interest was indicated in being a part of such a structure if it was initiated. This widespread expression of a willingness to serve and desire to participate was true of parent respondents in all schools. So, too, was it common of parents who were not in favor of a shared decision-making structure as well as supporters of the concept.

FACTORS RELATED TO ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Analysis of the data related to professional educators' attitudes toward the concept of shared decision-making authority with parents in the operation of the local school revealed the existence of certain factors which appeared to be related to those attitudes. The factors were: (1) the perception of the professional role, (2) the role of the parents, (3) experiences with parent involvement, and (4) satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

The Perception of the Professional Role

Principals and teachers defined their role in the school in a particular way. The way in which their professional role in the school was defined seemed to be related in a fundamental way to their perception of the most appropriate role for parents in the school and also to the attitudes held by many professional educators toward parent participation in the school.

Professional educator responsibilities. Basic to the professional role, as conceived by professional educators, was the conviction that the primary responsibility for what does, and does not, happen in a school belonged with the professional educator. As a consequence, professional educators have adopted a dominant role in the school decision-making process. The educational philosophy, or the basic purpose or direction, of the school was seen to be a professional educator responsibility and was to be developed in accordance with the educational beliefs of the school principal and staff. The role of parents in relation to the school philosophy was to abide by its contents and to support the principal and staff in its implementation. One teacher indicated her conception of the parent-professional educator relationship when she commented:

> . . . they [parents] could cause a lot of problems with some of their attitudes if they weren't willing to accept the school philosophy. I think that the school philosophy has to be set by the people who are going to be implementing it, and that's the teachers, the professionals, and once that's accepted by the parents then they can work on understanding it, then work with us at that level . . .

Another teacher who had a similar conception of the parent-professional educator relationship commented:

> . . . sometimes maybe the philosophy of the parents is not quite what it should be. Sometimes I think they can get off the beaten track. I don't mind parents in the school at all but they have to know their place .

In this context, the extent of parents' influence in the school largely becomes a function of the closeness of fit between the educational philosophy of the professional educators at the school and that of the parents of children attending the school. In commenting on the limited extent of parent influence in particular decision areas at his school, one principal explained:

> We tend to take a different tack to educating children. We deal with the whole child. We are quite comfortable in doing that and in maintaining that position. If we are forced to go in a different direction well then it [the school] would have to be staffed differently right from the principal down.

A teacher discussing a difference of opinion between herself and some parents over basic educational philosophy referred to differences in the philosophy of herself and the parents. It was clear, however, whose views were felt to prevail:

> What they want is not congruent with my philosophy of education or the reason why I'm hired at this school, and that's basically what it all boils down to.

Related to the adoption and implementation of a school philosophy are decisions which professional educators also saw as their responsibility, decisions concerning the basic structure and organization of the school, the nature of the school program, the detail of childrens' educational experiences in the school and the way in which the learning environment of the school was structured and managed.

Professional training and expertise. Fundamental to the way in which the professional role was conceived was a widespread belief in the primacy of professional training and expertise as crucial in the effective performance of the educational task. In general, professional educators saw themselves as well-trained and expert in their area of training. Implicit in this belief was that professional educators knew best what the educational needs of children were. While the suggestions and opinions of parents concerning the schooling of their children were welcome and often well-received, the general superiority of professional opinion and judgment was taken for granted on most educational issues. The moderate position in respect to professionalism was expressed by this teacher who, in fact, supported a more substantive role for parents in the school:

> If there is indeed any concept of professionalism there have to be a few areas in which you choose to be a benevolent dictator. There have to be a few [decision areas] that you retain.

Professional expertise and training was also the basis of this, and many other teachers', response to a more substantive role for parents:

> . . . it's not their job. If they want something that's really relevant like sitting with the child and teaching them, then you can become the teacher . . . . You can't just expect us to bend over and tell them they can have our jobs. I welcome parents. They come in, they do what I ask and if they suggest a different approach or whatever, fine, but they are not going to take over the classroom or change anything. I do it for a reason what I am doing.

The need for decision-making authority. Because of their special training and expertise, professional educators felt a special obligation to do all in their power to ensure that the children in their care received the best possible educational opportunities, as defined by the school principal and staff. In meeting this obligation the need to override parent opinion would sometimes arise. However, there was a common professional educator opinion that parents have hired professionals to do a job and, within limits, professionals should be allowed to get on with the job with as little interference as possible. Parents should have confidence and trust in professional educators' integrity and expertise. This commonly expressed and implied belief was well summarized by the teacher who claimed:

> . . . we as professionals think that they [parents] should trust us to be able to do the kinds of things that we've been hired to do without them always being around to oversee us.

The Role of Parents in the School

In discussing their attitude towards the concept of sharing decision-making authority with parents, over half of the professional educator respondents made some reference to what they conceived to be an appropriate role for parents in the school. The attitude a principal or teacher held towards sharing decision-making authority with parents seemed to be related to the way in which the appropriate role of a parent in the school was conceptualized.

Parents as supporters and volunteers. It was evident that most professional educators conceived the role of parents in a school to be concerned, essentially, with service to, and support of, the activities and decisions of school personnel. Parents have traditionally performed a wide range of volunteer services in the school, both outside and inside the classroom. Parent volunteers have served the school as library assistants, in the preparation of teaching materials, as drivers and supervisors on school field trips, and in a host of other volunteer activities. These services are highly valued by most principals and teachers and often a school comes to rely heavily on parent volunteer services. The service role of parents was continually stressed by principals and teachers in discussion concerning the role of parents. A typical comment came from a teacher who stated:

> I've been involved with parents as far as my own students are concerned for years, and in various clubs within the school, helping to go on field trips, various things like that, and parents are very cooperative and very helpful in those areas . . . . We couldn't do without them in many cases, whether it's a track meet or whatever it is. In those areas they're good.

Further, it was commonly perceived that parents were content, or at least very willing, to be engaged in service-type activities. By serving the school, by assisting in fundraising activities, parents were seen to be actively pursuing their objective that their children's learning conditions should be as desirable as possible. According to one teacher:

> . . . parents are most interested in the facilities in which their children are educated, and I think that brings a role for parents in a group such as the P.T.A., to make sure that the equipment, supplies within facilities, and the facilities themselves are adequate.

Related to the primary function of service to the school, parents were also perceived to have an obligation to act in ways that supported the activities of the school. Support could be indicated in a variety of ways. Parents were expected to attend the range of social and ceremonial activities conducted by the school and were accused of failing to support the school when they did not meet that obligation. Parents were expected to support the principal and staff in discussions about the school with other parents, with community members, and in their homes. The primary objective of parent organizations in the school was perceived to be to support the decisions of the principal and staff. Any significant opposition to those decisions was interpreted as indicative of a lack of support, even disloyalty, and was to be discouraged. The underlying obligation to support the school principal and staff was often evident in the comments of school principals and teachers concerning the role of parents in the school. The principal of one school with a formal parent-advisory structure commented:

> Even our parent advisory council, I don't think they would want that [shared decision-making] . . . . They like to know what's going on, they like to know why something is going on and they like to have their opinions expressed. Generally, I would say that they are more a support group.

A teacher who was opposed to sharing decision-making authority with parents also alluded to the obligation of parents to support the school and distinguished between "bad parents", who might oppose school personnel, and "good parents" who would be supportive of the school principal and staff. She observed:

> You could get into a lot of trouble if you got a really strong parent group and they didn't go along with the philosophy of the school. And yet if you get a good parents' group that backed the philosophy of the school, which is set by your administration, then I think you could get some really good results. If they were willing to back you up.

Support for the school principal and staff was also the primary objective of this teacher in her definition of the role of parents in the school:

> . . . I do think that we teach the kids, we decide what we are focusing on and parents that can accept that can

> then at that level jump in there. But I see it as supportive, I don't see them taking a strong role.

Advice, not decision-making. While the service and support component of the ideal parent role are emphasized, principals and teachers generally have not opposed parents having the opportunity to offer advice and input into the school decision-making process. While it was considered that parents, in general, were infrequent communicators with school personnel, some parents clearly demanded a more significant role and principals and teachers recognized the practical necessity to ensure that channels of communication were available to satisfy the needs of parents who desired to use them. One teacher at the school where there was tension between professional staff and parents commented in this respect:

> I think that we're going to have to come to that [shared decision-making] in time because people out there are not sitting back any longer, and they really want to be involved for whatever reason . . . . Parents just aren't taking no for an answer.
>
> I mean we haven't shown up at P.T.A. meetings and they still want to see us.

The practical need to consider parents' opinion in school decisions was also noted by the principal who commented:

> We have been encouraged to make sure we have a lot of our publics involved in decisions. But they do not make decisions, their opinions are sought . . . . I must have their opinions . . . . If I did things that were contrary to the general opinions of the people you are not going to survive.

Perhaps the ultimate objective of parent involvement, including the regular and systematic opportunity for the injection of parent opinion into the decision-making process, was the achievement of greater knowledge and understanding of the school and its operation. This, it was hoped, would result in greater parent support for, and satisfaction with, the school as a whole. One teacher summarized a view implicit in the views of other professional educators:

> I guess I would like to see parents' role in the school as one of volunteers, as one of support. I would like to see teachers initiate tasks for parents. I would like to see them operate some kind of volunteer program whereby parents can have input in different ways, not just material preparation, etc. but some sort of organization where parents are actively involved in the school and can see what's happening. They can possibly become more familiar with our roles, and maybe in the end be more satisfied with what's happening here.

Experiences with Parent Involvement

Teachers reported being influenced in their attitude towards sharing decision-making authority with parents by the nature of their past and present experiences with parents involved in the school. Of the 16 teacher respondents 12 referred to their previous experiences with parents in the school in discussing their attitude towards the concept of shared decision-making. Further, there was a close correspondence between the expressed attitude towards the concept of shared decision-making and the reported nature of experiences with parents. Teachers who reported generally positive experiences with parents were also supportive of the concept of shared decision-making in six cases out of eight, while teachers who reported mostly negative experiences with parents were unanimous in their opposition to shared decision-making authority with parents. The strongest negative feeling towards parents came from teachers at the school where obvious tension existed between the professional staff and the parents. These were also the teachers who expressed the strongest opposition to sharing decision-making authority with parents.

The positive experiences. Teachers who reported general support for the concept of shared decision-making were also likely to have expressed positive reactions to their previous interactions with parents in the school. Those teachers referred to the friendly and cooperative relations which they had been able to develop with parents, and to the value of those relationships in improving the educational opportunities of children. One teacher described her feelings:

> If it [previous experience] has colored it, it's colored it positive. I feel I have good relations with the parents within my classroom. I have parents who just walk in, who think nothing of making an appointment. It's just come in, you're more than welcome.

Another teacher expressed similar sentiments when he commented:

> I've always found parents pretty logical, reasoning people who you can talk to, who can help you . . . . It's very important to me to meet with parents.

The value of positive parent-teacher relations was commented upon also in the context of the help those parents can provide to teachers:

> I think, on the overall, I have really good feelings about the involvement I've had with parents, and I don't know what we'd do without them in a lot of the work that they do for the school and the time and energy they'll spend.

Often, teachers can trace their positive feelings towards parents in the school to a particular issue or situation. One teacher described how the parents of children in her class banded together to influence the local school board not to transfer her to another school. This teacher explained that support in terms of the positive relationship that had been developed between her and the parents. She commented:

> So in that case I had very, very positive relationships with the parents . . . , my first year teaching. Those parents are still my friends. I've always had positive experiences.

Another example of the influence of a positive experience on a teacher's attitude towards the role of parents in a school came from a teacher who recalled:

> I had a class in grade five that I kept in grade six and I got to know the parents quite well, not formally, they would drop in. At the end of grade six . . . , they [the parents] wanted to keep them in elementary school for another year. Well we sat down and worked together and got a special grant to keep the kids in that school for grade seven and I taught them again that year . . . . It was probably the most wonderful teaching experience that I have ever had.

The negative experience. There was a perfect correspondence between teachers who described their present or past experiences with parents as negative and their reported opposition to sharing decision-making authority with parents.

Three of the four teachers who reported negative experiences with parents were respondents from the school where there was tension between school personnel and parents of children attending the school. These teachers indicated that their attitude towards sharing decision-making authority with parents had certainly been influenced by their experience. The teachers alleged that parents were attempting to supersede the principal and staff as decision-makers in relation to the educational aspects of the school's operation, that parents wished to promote an educational approach which was unacceptable to the principal and staff, and that parents were exerting unreasonable pressure on the principal and staff in their attempts to achieve that objective. The gravity of the situation is evident in the words of this teacher whose views also described the feelings of other teachers:

> . . . [past experience] is very important right now [and] it has been for a couple of months for me in that there is this particular group of parents who don't know what my kind of program is . . . , and are pushing for something else that they want, and are using pressure tactics. That's all it is and [they are] making it very miserable to try and function . . . . In the last couple of weeks there have been days when I have [thought], "Why am I here? I don't want to be here."

Another teacher expressed similar feelings somewhat differently when she indicated that her attitude towards parent participation in the school was also influenced by her experiences at the school:

> . . . there are some individuals that don't really have any help to offer, they just want to get in and

> criticize . . . . It's because of the pressure that they put on us, the demands that they like to make . . . . I think differently than I might have.

Negative response to parents can also be generated as a consequence of things parents have been perceived not to have done. Lack of positive feedback was the basis of the negative feelings expressed towards parents by a teacher from another school. This teacher was also a bitter opponent of the concept of shared decision-making. She believed that teachers who opposed the concept did so largely because of their negative experiences with parents. She commented:

> What do we see of parents? We see them reacting to things they don't agree with. Negatively 90% of the time. I can count the times that a positive note is sent into the school, not to me, but into the school . . . , as far as positive, you know, half a dozen [times] in five years.

Satisfaction with the Existing Arrangements

Principals and teachers expressed their general satisfaction with the existing arrangements for the incorporation of parent opinion and concerns in the school decision-making process. It was evident that professional educators' attitudes toward sharing decision-making authority with parents were related to that level of satisfaction.

Perceived parent needs. Parents were commonly perceived to desire only that the school be open and accessible to them and that the school principal and staff demonstrate a willingness to listen to parents' views and concerns in an impartial and courteous way, and be responsive to those views and concerns whenever this was possible. As one principal explained:

> They [parents] like to have that avenue open where if they're dissatisfied they know who they can express their dissatisfaction to . . . , they want that avenue open. I'm sure they want to feel that the school is approachable and that if they do have a complaint, [a] legitimate complaint, that action is taken. And it is . . . . They feel as though they have a certain amount of power and they're listened to. But I think in terms of having a formal structure, where they help run this, I don't think they want that.

It was commonly agreed that the existing avenues of communication between school personnel and interested parents were sufficient to meet the needs of most parents. Further, school personnel were perceived to be open and approachable and willing to listen to parents' opinions and concerns if parents sought the opportunity to communicate with them. Principals and teachers stressed the right of parents to be heard, and their right of access to information relating to the way in which the school operated and functioned. Implicit in that right was that much of the initiative for making contact rested with parents. As one teacher commented:

> Right now they've got the option of coming in and stating and finding out -- if they want to. If they really have a concern they will take the time off work, they'll talk to us and they'll see what's going on, and then they'll make their statements.

Preference for informal arrangements. Principals and teachers reported a preference for direct forms of communication with parents and for what they described as informal methods of parent involvement in school decision-making. Further, it was felt that informal parent influence was likely to have a greater affect than if formal, mandated procedures were established. One principal described his feelings:

> The kind of parental governance, or involvement in the governance of our school is, I'm tempted to use the word subversive, but it isn't. It is on an informal basis. Because of its informality, I think it holds far more sway with us when they [parents] attempt to do it in a way that sort of says, "I have a concern, can you help?" And we get to work together, we as teachers and the parents . . .

Another principal expressed similar sentiments. He commented:

> I don't want to sound too negative, but my overall view is that I rather like it the way it is now; that we do have a lot of informal parent involvement . . . . In fact, in many cases the sort of cooperative decision-making we have with parents is preferable.

Parent and professional educator satisfaction. Satisfaction with the existing arrangements was increased by the perception of school principals and teachers that parents were involved in decisions to a certain extent and that most parents were happy with the existing arrangements. One principal expressed a commonly held view when he commented:

> I believe by and large, according to our survey, that they [parents] feel that they have a reasonable say in decisions that affect their child in school . . . . Basically the wishes of parents as expressed to me and my staff, I think they're very well met.

Parents' satisfaction with the existing arrangements was communicated to another principal by the esteem in which he perceived he was held by parents. He observed:

> I'm able to walk down and get a gift from a parent, and a note that says, "We're sure glad we've found a principal who can hug", or when I'm dealing with parents in the community on a first name basis.

Three of the four school principals made reference to the annual survey of parent opinion conducted by the Edmonton Public School Board in commenting on parents' satisfaction. The survey has consistently yielded high levels of reported parent satisfaction with their input into school decisions that affect their children.

For other professional educators, satisfaction with the existing arrangements for hearing parents' opinion was a natural consequence of their belief in the rightness, or appropriateness, of the existing relationship between professional educators and parents. According to this view, professional dominance of decision-making related to key decision areas of the school's operation was right and proper and, assuming that parent opinion was welcomed, listened to, and acted upon where appropriate, the nature of the existing relationship remained the most desirable. One teacher aptly expressed this position when she observed:

> I guess for me there are a lot of things worse than a benevolent kind of dictatorship, with the emphasis on the benevolent. I see a whole lot of really caring and human environments where people spend time, and I give a lot of credit when something is working well and people are able to function and basically feel good about themselves a lot of the time.

FACTORS RELATED TO ATTITUDES TOWARD PARENT PARTICIPATION: A SYNTHESIS

Factors related to parents' and professional educators' attitudes toward the participation of parents in school decision-making are summarized in Table 5.0. Commonality, and important differences, are evident.

Both groups conceptualized a particular and appropriate relationship between parents and professional educators which, in turn, related to their respective attitudes toward the concept of shared decision-making.

Parents saw limits to the extent to which their participation in the school was appropriate and distinguished between their participation in major policy initiatives and the day-to-day operating decisions of school personnel in which they sought no part. Parents also perceived the necessity for professional training, expertise and knowledge in the effective performance of the professional role and felt that a certain degree of decision-making discretion for the school principal and staff was a necessary condition for the effective performance of the professional task.

Principals and teachers also conceptualized particular roles for professional educators and parents related to the operation of the local school which differed from those conceptualized by parents in important respects. For professional educators, the primary responsibility for the way in which the school functioned lay with the principal

Table 5.0

Factors Related to Attitudes Toward Parent

Participation in School Decision-Making

Parents	Professional Educators
1. Concerns about parent qualifications to participate effectively. . parent interest . parent knowledge, expertise . parent perspectives	1. The way in which the professional educator role is defined. . professional responsibilities . professional training, expertise . the need for decision-making authority
2. An appropriate relationship between parents and professional educators. . the need to be heard . limits to participation . primacy of professional expertise	2. The way in which the parent role is defined. . parents as volunteers and supporters . advice, not decision-making
3. Concerns about the extent to which elected parents would be representative.	3. The past and present experiences of teachers with parent involvement.
4. The desirability of shared decision-making as the end-point in a developmental process.	4. Professional educator satisfaction with the existing arrangements. . perceived parent needs . preference for informal arrangements . parent and professional educator satisfaction

and staff. Fundamental to the assumption of that responsibility was the high level of professional training and expertise which professional educators were perceived to possess which fitted them to perform that task. Implicit in the successful performance of the professional role was the need for a substantial degree of decision-making discretion for the school principal and staff.

Professional educators' concept of the most appropriate role for parents in the school was related to the way in which the professional role was defined. Parents were expected to serve and support the school principal and staff in a variety of ways. While the right and desirability of including parents' opinion in the school decision-making process was widely acknowledged by professional educators, the right of the professional to make the final decision was continuously reasserted.

Parents and professional educators, then, conceived limits to the extent to which parents should participate in local school decision-making, both on the basis of what was perceived to be an appropriate parent-professional educator relationship. Important differences in emphasis were evident in the thinking which was basic to both positions. Parents imposed limits on their participation in recognition of the professional expertise and training of the school principal and staff and the need for some decision-making discretion in the interest of overall school effectiveness. Participation or substantial involvement was desired only in decisions defined by parents as fundamental to the operation of the school or to the educational opportunities of their children.

Professional educators, on the other hand, conceptualized a professional role which effectively barred parents from any substantial participation in the school decision-making process and defined a role for parents which was advisory at best and clearly inferior to the decision-making function of professional educators. While acknowledging the desirability of parent input into the decision-making process, the forthright claim to final decision-making authority necessarily limited the opportunity for a meaningful parent role in the decision-making process. By emphasizing the service and support component of the parent role, the superiority of the professional educator in the decision-making process was reinforced.

The attitudes of professional educators toward the concept of shared decision-making was also related to their satisfaction with the existing arrangements for incorporating parent opinion into the decision-making process. This satisfaction was, in turn, related to the way in which professional educators defined their role and the role of parents in the school. Principals and teachers reported a reasonable level of parent influence into the school decision-making process as a consequence of the more informal modes currently in use, and argued that they acceded to parents' demands that school personnel be open, accessible and responsive to parents' concerns and opinions. As a consequence, parents' satisfaction with schools was perceived to be high, the available modes of communication were perceived to meet the needs of most parents and, therefore, in accordance with the propriety of the existing parent-professional educator relationship, there would be nothing gained by tampering with the existing arrangements.

Teachers were also influenced in their attitudes toward the concept of shared decision-making by the nature of their experiences with parents in the school. Teachers who reported negative experiences with parents were also opposed to the concept of sharing decision-making authority with parents. There was also a close correspondence between teachers who reported positive experiences with parents and their support for shared decision-making.

Parents indicated a widespread lack of confidence in the capacity of parents as a whole to effectively undertake a shared decision-making role with professional educators. Parents, in general, were perceived to be uninterested, to lack the requisite knowledge and expertise and to be incapable of adopting the broader perspective to problem-solving that would be required. In contrast, parent respondents, especially highly involved parents, did not consider themselves to be deficient in these qualities. Professional educators, however, did not focus on any perceived deficiencies in parents. Rather, they chose to emphasize their own superior training and expert knowledge.

Parents also expressed concern that elected parent representative bodies would be dominated by small group interests and would not be representative of parents as a whole. The few professional educators who expressed a similar concern did so, not in the belief that elected parents would be poor representatives but, rather, that they would be the type of parent most likely to challenge professional dominance and would, therefore, be very difficult for professional educators to work with.

Parents' lack of confidence in parents as a whole was further emphasized by the expressed belief in the lack of readiness of most school communities to undertake a shared decision-making role in the school. Rather, shared decision-making was seen as the end point in a developmental process. Incremental changes in the role of parents in the school, including experience in an advisory capacity, were thought to be necessary prior to the general assumption of shared decision-making status.

While parents were insecure and uncertain in their attitude towards sharing decision-making authority with their school principal and staff and imposed what they defined as necessary limits to their appropriate participation in school decision-making, professional educators were rather more forthright in their belief that the current parent professional-educator relationship was proper and that change was neither desirable nor necessary.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter findings have been presented and discussed relating to parent and professional educator attitudes toward parent participation in local school decision-making and factors related to those attitudes. Parents and professional educators have reported widespread opposition, ambivalence or reticence towards the concept of shared decision-making between parents and professional educators in the operation of their local school. In fact, not a single respondent was confident enough of the concept to express unqualified support. In considering these findings several important themes seem to have emerged.

The Opportunity to Participate

Parents and professional educators have referred to the possible influence of existing practice on their attitudes toward parent participation in school decision-making. Both groups have very limited experience as participants in the school decision-making process.

The lack of a recent tradition of parent participation in local school decision-making in the Edmonton Public School district has already been noted. In practice the nature of the parent role depends largely upon the individual disposition of individual school principals. While parents in some school communities may be quite influential, that influence is at the pleasure of school officials and is not exerted in any form of legal, shared decision-making. A number of parents specifically referred to their difficulty in conceptualizing a shared decision-making procedure in operation and other parents alluded to that difficulty. Several parents were incredulous and felt that it just couldn't be done. The lack of appropriate opportunities to participate in decision-making related to the operation of the school, at least in decision areas parents perceived as important, might have consequences not only for parent attitudes towards the concept, but also for the way in which parent-professional educator relationships are perceived. In respect to the relevance of opportunities to participate, it is pertinent to note that highly involved parents were consistently dissatisfied with the current role of parents and consistently supportive of a shared decision-making function, albeit with some reservations. The lack of opportunities to participate could also be related to the widespread lack of confidence which was expressed in the ability of parents in general to function successfully in a shared decision-making role.

Principals and teachers also referred to significant limitations to their opportunity to participate in key areas of school decision-making. Principals and teachers referred to what they perceived as prescriptive and restrictive curriculum regulations which severely constrained their autonomy in that crucial decision area. Teachers also reported having no role in the selection of their school principal or staff, and an advisory role at best in the formulation of the school budget and other areas of school policy development. Formal shared decision-making procedures do not apply. Comment was often made that one cannot share something that is not possessed, and that the often limited role of teachers in the school decision-making process was likely to affect attitudes toward parents assuming a decision-making role.

It is possible, then, that a substantial part of the obvious parent and professional educator reluctance about shared decision-making may be the result of a widespread lack of experience in the school decision-making process.

The Importance of Role Definition

The way in which professional educators and parents have defined their respective roles may have important implications for the nature of the relationship between the two groups and for their attitudes towards parent participation in the school.

By virtue of their special training and expertise, professional educators have assumed responsibility for key areas of the school's operation and, by implication, the final decision-making authority necessary to meet those responsibilities. This is particularly the case in the crucial area of curriculum and instruction. In so doing, professional educators have not only assumed a dominating role for themselves but they have also effectively excluded parents from a substantive role in the school decision-making process. The nature of the professional role, as defined, stipulates that this be so. Support for a procedure which challenges that definition of the professional role would, therefore, be improbable. In accordance with the way in which the professional role has been defined, professional educators have emphasized the service and support aspect of the parent role. Parents, within that role, can best contribute to their children's education by demonstrating their service and support of school personnel, their decisions and their activities.

Parents, too, have conceptualized an ideal role relationship between themselves and professional educators. Parents were aware of their virtual exclusion from the school decision-making process. They have reported that their influence is limited, uneven and peripheral, albeit that half the parent respondents were still satisfied with the existing relationship. Most parents desired the opportunity to be heard, whether as participants or simply by being involved in the school decision-making process. Yet clearly defined limits have been imposed on parents by parents concerning their desired role. Parents respected the need for professional training and expertise in the conduct of the educational process and acknowledged professional qualifications in that respect. Parents also felt that a degree of professional autonomy is needed if the school principal and staff are to function effectively, and willingly yield that. Further, a substantial proportion of parents expressed doubts about their capacity to contribute to decisions they saw as technical and were content to leave the decisions with the professionals.

Fundamental to the defined relationship between parents and professional educators was a certain insecurity or lack of confidence on the part of most parents, a feeling that education is highly technical and best left to the experts. Even the substantial group of parents who were clearly desirous of a more substantial role in the school were reticent, hesitant, and limited in their objectives, often advocating change but only in incremental, carefully controlled steps.

It is likely that the attitudes of parents and professional educators towards each other are influenced in fundamental ways by the basic assumptions implicit in the ways in which their respective roles have been defined.

The Highly Involved Parent

In comparison with parent respondents as a whole, highly involved parents were uniform in reporting their general dissatisfaction with the current role of parents in schools. Further, they were strong advocates of a more authoritative role for parents and supported a shared decision-making function in the key decision-making areas addressed -- curriculum and instruction, personnel selection and financial planning. It is not surprising, then, that highly involved parents were also consistently supportive of the concept of shared decision-making between parents and professional educators, albeit with some reservations.

Even allowing for the absence of a formal decision-making function, their membership on a formal parent-advisory body has given highly involved parents opportunities to become more aware, knowledgeable, and intimately involved in the school decision-making process than other parents. In contrast to most parents, highly involved parents saw the existence of a formal structure as a necessary condition for the effective, on-going communication of parents' views to school personnel, despite their criticism of the existing effectiveness of the bodies of which they are, or have been, members.

It may be that membership of a representative body provides opportunities to be involved in decision-making, offers experience and greater knowledge in the way in which a school functions, and places individuals in closer contact with the school principal and staff members, all of which relate in some way to attitudes toward the role of parents in a school and toward the concept of shared decision-making.

CHAPTER 6

FACTORS RELATED TO PROPENSITY TO PARTICIPATE

In this chapter findings related to Research Problem 4 are presented and discussed. Research Problem 4 reads:

> What factors relate to the propensity of parents to participate in local school decision-making?

The purpose of this problem was to investigate factors that parents and professional educators reported were related to parents' decisions to seek to participate, or not participate, in the local school decision-making process.

FACTORS RELATED TO PROPENSITY TO PARTICIPATE: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 4.1. What factors influence parents in their decisions to seek to participate, or not participate, in their local school?

Analysis of the data resulted in the identification of six factors related to parents' propensity to become involved and to participate in their local school. The six factors were: (1) the welfare of their children, (2) particular issues, (3) influence of the professional educator, (4) satisfaction with the school, (5) the person and the role, and (6) school advisory experience.

The Welfare of their Children

Parents were convinced that an education of the highest quality was of utmost importance to the future well-being of their children. The pursuit of that objective was paramount in parents' decisions to become actively involved in the operation of their children's school. Parents were concerned most with the welfare of their own children and the focus of involvement was individual children in individual families and very rarely was concern expressed on a more general basis. While children in the school as a whole could benefit from particular acts of involvement or participation by parents, the initial motivation was almost always child-specific. One parent whose views reflected those of most other parents stated that her involvement was:

> . . . totally because of my own child. Yes, it's very selfish but certainly if I didn't have children coming up to be going to school . . . my energies would be going into some other avenue.

The quality of education. Parents emphasized the importance of a high quality education for their children. Parent involvement was reported to be motivated by a desire to do all possible to maximize the quality of their children's educational opportunities and a belief that active involvement would help in the pursuit of that objective. Interest and concern for some aspect of the quality of educational experiences as a basic motive for involvement was referred to by all highly involved parents and by more than half of the remaining parent respondents. As one highly involved parent explained:

> I guess it's simply [that] I'm very concerned with the quality of education my children receive. I believe

> firmly that the approach they learn to education at this level will affect them through the remainder of their classroom years and probably for the rest of their lives. That's too important to just let happen.

Another highly involved parent suggested:

> The primary motivation for me is the fact that I think education is really important. It has a much higher priority with me than a lot of people.

Parents' confidence that their involvement could influence the educational performance of their children was reflected in the comments of the parent who felt:

> . . . it's once you see your own child's standard slipping or not attaining the level you know he should . . . . I think once you see that, really, he is not performing at the level he should be, that's when you decide to get involved.

Benefits were also perceived to result from knowing staff members and being known in the school. One parent felt:

> . . . it was nice to know my child's teacher on a first name basis, and now I feel that if anything happens at school, that could be major or minor, with my children, they [teachers] would tell me. They wouldn't hesitate to phone or speak to me . . .

Similarly, some parents saw their assistance to staff members as having positive outcomes for their children in terms of better quality educational experiences. As one parent explained:

> . . . if we do something for the school it's going to give the teacher that much more time to spend with the children. We do a lot of little things for them [and] that gives them [teachers] more time.

The monitoring function. Related to parents' concern for the quality of their children's education was the opportunity that involved parents had to monitor what was, and was not, happening in the school. While the monitoring function was not usually seen as a primary motivation for involvement, parents clearly recognized the opportunities that their regular involvement in the school afforded in that respect. In fact, parents commonly referred to the way in which they used their involvement opportunities to monitor their children's performance and to make judgments about aspects of the school's performance and the quality of the school staff. One parent who was categoric about his desire to monitor commented:

> Absolutely, . . . I want to know what's going on. My children spend so many hours in that place I want to know what they're being taught. I certainly don't get any feedback from the children other than a little art project or something that they bring home from school . . . , so I kind of like to know what's going on there.

The intent of this parent was also quite clear:

> If I'm there I know what's happening. An eight year old is sitting doing his math and health all day . . . , but he doesn't really know what's happening. But if you're there, even if you're doing menial tasks and you go for coffee . . . , you get a kind of more of an inside look at the school, at what's happening.

Parents' concern about the progress of their children at school was expressed over and over again. Regular involvement provided some parents with the opportunity to monitor their children's progress and, sometimes, to compare progress with that of other children. This purpose is evident in the comments of the parent who explained:

> I'm watching very closely on the spelling, the reading the writing. I can see that they need to stress printing. There isn't a child in my [child's] classroom who can print.

Another parent who used her active involvement in the school to monitor her children's progress commented:

> I'm very interested in what's going on. I don't want to be told in grade 4, "Oh, this should have been done in grade 2". That makes me very angry, and this is what happens when you don't make yourself available.

Parents' motives in monitoring the activities of the school and the progress of their children were not sinister or conspiratorial. While some parents were quite clear in their monitoring objectives, for most parents the monitoring function was a natural outcome of their involvement. Parents' presence in the school, their activities in the classroom, and their more frequent interaction with the school principal and staff afforded the opportunity to scrutinize the educational progress of their children more carefully than would otherwise have been possible and this opportunity was, not surprisingly, commonly taken up.

Benefits for children. Some parents also perceived that their active involvement in their children's school had positive outcomes for the personal, as well as the educational, development of children. Parents alluded to a particular relationship between parents and their children, a relationship which was promoted by parents' interest and involvement in all aspects of their children's lives, including their school. The underlying idea, implicit in the comments of other parents, was expressed by this highly involved parent who explained his feelings about involvement in his children's school:

> I think it's important for parents to be there . . . . I think children like the idea that their parents participate. I think there is a tremendous security for

> children to realize that their parents can be relied upon and are there.

The potential for building a special relationship between parents and child was also felt by the parent who recalled how she felt as a child. She sought to emulate that feeling in her children and explained:

> I think it's nice for children . . . . I think even when I was in school my Mum would come once a year to the school and you were so excited that your mother came to the school. I found that with them [her children] . . . , that it was something special for them for me to be involved in their life.

Some parents also perceived that their interest and involvement motivated their children to a higher level of performance. Children who saw that their parents were interested in what was happening were perceived to feel more content and perform more effectively. One parent who espoused that point of view commented:

> I think that children, if their parents are the right kind of parents, perform better when they are being observed by their parents and the parents of their peers than they do if they feel they [parents] are out of ear-shot or out of sight.

A similar opinion was expressed by the parent who felt that:

> . . . the kids do more if their parents are involved because they're interested in what they [the children] are doing. They can say "Madame ____," and you know who they are talking about . . . . I just think it's a benefit to the child if you can involve yourself . . . , and that's why I'm visible at the school.

Particular Issues

It was clear that, for some parents, the stimulus that transformed interest and concern for their children's education into decisions to become actively involved in the operation of their children's school was a particular occurence, issue or situation relating to some aspect of the school's operation or their own children's education. While the perceived affect on their own children still constituted the basic consideration, the stimulus to act for these parents was a response to a particular situation.

This pattern was particularly evident in the case of highly involved parents or parent respondents who considered themselves to be highly involved in the operation of their children's school. These parents were able to identify particular issues which they defined as being a primary motivation for their initial decision to become involved in the school, an involvement that has been maintained.

The situation which provided the initial stimulus for involvement and desire to participate was clear in the mind of the parent who explained that she had become involved:

> . . . when our first child started kindergarten, my first experience with the education system. I was very unhappy. I wrote letters off to the Journal and to the Sun . . . . I was very upset . . . , so from the first day he started kindergarten, I've been involved . . . , and I think I always will be . . .

A highly involved parent recalled that his active involvement and desire to participate was a consequence of a concern over the progress of one of his children and his growing unhappiness with the performance of his child's teacher. The situation for this parent was exacerbated when, in the following year, his child had another interrupted year due to the mid-year pregnancy of his teacher. The parent was convinced that the specific occurrence:

> . . . triggered dissatisfaction, and then what came out of that was that a bunch of parents finally got to talk to one another about this problem . . . , and you began to see that things aren't what they could be . . .

The school's lack of a kindergarten program was the initial stimulus for the on-going involvement of another highly involved parent. He explained:

> We were determined that if the school division had funds for that program that it should happen within the school,and so that's where we started.

The same parent commented on his continuing involvement and efforts to participate in the operation of the school:

> . . . the thing that has continued to keep our interest was the fact that a group of parents got involved with parent input . . . , a certain amount of parent enrichment of a [curriculum] program, and it continued. There were then some other issues that came up . . .

The way in which parent involvement, and attempts to exert more influence, develops in some parents was evident in the comments of this highly involved parent:

> My first connection with the school was when ____ [her daughter] went to kindergarten. She's in grade six now . . . , when my kid started school I was not impressed with the school she was in. I was quite discontented . . . . So I felt the need to find something else, and in doing that I had to investigate what was going on in the school, . . . you learn more about it, and then you see there's a few areas that could use a little looking at, and I just kept getting more deeply involved.

These parents seemed, first of all, to have a high interest in education and in the educational opportunities and progress of their own children. This interest was often translated into decisions to become involved, and to seek to participate in the operation of the school, when a situation arose or an issue emerged which was defined by those parents as likely to have important consequences for the well-being of their children. Involvement for highly involved parents became not episodic but, rather, an on-going commitment often further stimulated by the emergence of new issues or situations which required attention.

The Influence of Professional Educators

It was evident that the school principal and staff, and parents' perception of the profession as a whole, played a major role in the extent to which parents became active in their local school or sought to participate in its operation. Reference was made to the influence of the professional educator on parents' propensity to become involved and to participate by all but a small minority of parent respondents.

The attitudes of professional educators. A school principal and staff convey a clear message to parents concerning the way that they feel about parents' presence in the school and the role parents should play in the school. Parents were equally divided in their perception of the nature of the message, but were virtually unanimous about its importance. For approximately half of the parent respondents, professional educators' attitudes were interpreted as positive and welcoming and, therefore, acted to promote and encourage parents' presence in the school. One parent described her feelings in this way:

> From the very first when we met the principal in kindergarten, he told us what his attitude was going to be. He told us he had an open door policy that the staff had agreed on . . . , and we always felt comfortable about walking in.

A highly involved parent who reported having positive feelings about the school principal and staff, and identified professional educators' attitudes as important in her on-going involvement, commented:

> I just always felt this way about it. From the first time I was involved in the school, Mister ____ took me around and showed me the school . . . . I feel good in the school . . . . I have never felt that they didn't want me around.

Another parent described the climate that she felt contributed to her positive feelings in the school, and to her regular presence there:

> Lately the atmosphere that has been created in that school has been very conducive to the parent feeling comfortable coming to the school . . . . If I go over there when one of the teachers are having a coffee break, I'll go in and have coffee . . . . So I would never hesitate in saying something or suggesting something if I thought it was appropriate.

Parents in three of the four schools referred to positive feelings towards the school and their involvement in the school as a consequence of their interpretation of the attitude of the principal and staff towards parents. No parents from the school where there was tension between the principal and staff and parents expressed a similar feeling.

Almost half of the parent respondents reported that the attitudes of the school principal and staff had limited their desire to become involved and participate in the operation of the school or at least made that involvement, and attempts to exert influence, more difficult.

One parent who was deterred from active involvement by the attitudes of professional educators explained that he was made to feel inferior:

> . . . they [professional educators] feel they are better than us because of this [more education] and that we as parents are just ordinary people. We really don't have any great opinion because of our non-status. And I see that constantly. Any time there's a group of parents and teachers, I think they [teachers] segregate themselves mainly on that point, they're better . . . . A lot of times I think that's a deterrent to myself as a parent.

Two parents from the school where there was tension between school personnel and parents explained the effect that professional educator attitudes had on their feelings. One parent commented:

> . . . you go over there and you talk to somebody and you get such a negative response from it, and you think, "Damn it, why go through that again for the same result." . . . that again is the situation that occurs when you have somebody who is working essentially at odds to what seems to be going on with your feelings . . .

The second parent also suggested that the limiting factor to his involvement and participation was:

> . . . the principal himself, and how he views parent involvement because he can listen to advice all he wants but then he can just go ahead, and he just does what he wants.

Sometimes non-action can also have particular connotations for parents. One parent was deterred from more active involvement by what she interpreted as a subtle indication of professional educators' attitudes. This parent interpreted the decline in attendance at meetings between parents and the principal as a consequence of a lack of professional enthusiasm for the meeting:

> . . . I feel that there has been a bit of a lack there in not encouraging parents to come. A note goes out at the beginning of the year . . . , but I really think the parents need to feel a reminder every time, and you're getting encouragement to come.

The quality of the school principal. The way in which parents perceived the suitability and professional competence of the school principal seemed to be related to parents' propensity to participate in the operation of their local school. Ten of the twenty-four parent respondents referred to the quality of their school principal in discussing parent participation in local school decision-making. All but two of those parents did so in positive terms and indicated that their desire to participate in school decision-making was diminished as a consequence of that favorable judgment. Parents suggested that the higher their esteem for the professional capacity and suitability of the school principal, the less likely they were to actively lobby for a shared decision-making role in the school even, for some parents, in the light of their theoretical support for such a role. One highly involved parent who explained her reluctance to actively pursue shared decision-making status in terms of her high level of satisfaction with the school principal explained:

> . . . the reason the parents have so much say and are so happy at the school is primarily because of ____. He's really a good principal. He seems to know what he's

> doing and he takes into consideration everybody's feelings. I think that makes for all the difference in the world.

The temporary status of this position was suggested by the postscript of the same parent:

> If we had a principal who didn't care, who didn't have the childrens' best interest at heart, that would be different.

The perceived competence and suitability of the principal also diminished the desire to participate in school decision-making for this highly involved parent:

> . . . he [the principal] is very important because [he] is always willing to be there for things . . . . Everybody knows him, everybody. He seems to be genuinely interested in what he's doing. It's important to him that the children know who he is, for him to be a part of things. I'm so satisfied with the school.

On the other hand, the influence of parents' perception that the principal was not meeting their expectations could be seen in the comments of highly involved parents from the school where the relationship between the principal and parents was strained. One such parent commented:

> . . . our feeling is that things are not going as well as they could be. Also another thing is an extremely high turnover rate in teachers . . . . We lay it [the responsibility] much at the principal's door.

One parent commented that he would happily delegate more if he was convinced of the competence of the principal:

> . . . surely I would. If I had a man working for me and doing a particular job and I thought he understood it, I would give him a lot more room than if I've got somebody there that I think never quite cracked a nut on this thing.

The way in which dissatisfaction may stimulate parent action was indicated in this statement by another highly involved parent from the same school:

> . . . we realized that there were some members of staff who were, in our view, totally non-progressive . . . who didn't fit with the objectives . . . , and so in strength we realized that those people had to go . . . . So there had to be a kind of push here and a shove there. After that we were involved with an administrator [principal] who was very wishy-washy, and it [the administration] needed a little bit of grooming as well . . . . So when we couldn't see certain things happening we felt we had to push.

The influence of the principal on parents' propensity to participate is well summarized by the parent who explained:

> I think I would be motivated to insist on becoming involved in whatever, if I felt that my concerns weren't being received . . . , or if I felt I was in a confrontation right from the start, that would tend to set me off a little more quickly. So as a result, I think that in the long run a principal who is really receptive and supportive . . . , tends to mollify a great many of those kinds of inclinations or tendencies on my part . . .

Confidence in the profession. Over half of the parent respondents referred to their level of confidence in the profession as a whole in discussing parents' propensity to participate in local school decision-making. Of those parents who referred to the profession as a whole, almost all expressed a high level of confidence in the skills and expertise of professional educators as a group and their capacity to perform their professional task effectively. This confidence was seen to diminish parents' need and desire to participate in the school. Because professional educators were deemed competent and capable in the performance of their task, parents perceived less need to promote a more authoritative role for themselves in the school. There was little reason seen to do so.

For some parents, their trust and confidence emanated from the primacy of professional training and specialized knowledge professional educators were deemed to possess. As one parent explained:

> . . . they've been trained. We've got to put up some faith in that. Why are we in the schools at all? If I didn't have faith that my children were going to learn more socially, emotionally, going to grow more, then why wouldn't I do it at home?

Another parent deterred from pursuing a more active decision-making role in the school identified the basic reason as:

> . . . the expertise on the part of the teachers and administration. There is more expertise and better understanding of all the circumstances involved, both specific to the classroom and in terms of things like budget and existing policy, mandates, objectives.

For other parents, confidence in the profession as a whole was related to the good progress and positive experiences of their children at school. As one parent explained:

> My child seems to be learning well in both languages and she doesn't seem to be having problems, so therefore they [professional educators] must know what they're supposed to be doing.

A parent who thought similarly based his confidence on the successful school experience of his daughter:

> I've never been led so far to think the contrary. Again, based on confidence and experience over the last six years . . . , they [professional educators] are full of good intentions, they work well. They're a bunch of professional people who are doing a good job . . .

Expressed lack of confidence in the profession as a whole was almost non-existent. However, the comments of one highly involved parent are illustrative of the affects that lack of confidence may have on parents' propensity to participate:

> I don't have the confidence in the teachers that perhaps the ones who don't care do. They [professional educators] have only had three or four years of university themselves . . . , so I just want to make sure these teachers know what they're doing and are doing it properly. So I am there definitely as a monitor. It's not just that I don't trust them not doing it, it's just that I want to make sure . . . . And if things get a little past where I think they should be, or I begin to get unhappy with the way things are going, then I'm right there on top of it and can start the ball rolling the way I want it to go.

Satisfaction with the School

Parents' propensity to participate was related in an important way to parents' satisfaction with their children's school. The notion of general satisfaction was referred to by almost all parent respondents. So was the perceived relationship between parents' level of satisfaction with the school and their felt need to participate in its operation. This relationship was referred to as commonly by highly involved parents as by other parent respondents.

In all but a small minority of cases, parents who referred to their satisfaction did so in positive terms. These parents were generally satisfied with their children's school and, apparently as a consequence, felt a diminished need to participate in the school. Parents who reported less satisfaction with their school were all from the school where there was tension between the parents and school personnel.

Satisfied parents reaffirmed their tendency to base their judgment of the school largely on the progress and happiness of their own children and were firm in expressing their conviction that satisfaction led to a diminished need and desire to participate. One parent expressed a commonly held sentiment:

> . . . if I'm happy, if my husband's happy . . . , if everything's working great, then certainly we go on and say, "Hey, that's pretty good, let's go on to something else." I find that natural.

A similar view was expressed by the parent who explained that his two concerns were the educational and social development and the personal well-being of his children:

> I select those two issues as being broad concerns that would motivate me to get involved if I felt that either were not being taken care of . . . . My attitude is that as long as I perceive those things to be happening, then I am not likely to become involved in the decision-making . . . , there may be involvement, but not in terms of decision-making.

Parents felt that their desire to participate was likely to increase if they were, or became, less satisfied with the school. One parent suggested:

> . . . if we weren't happy, we would be over there and fighting far more than we are now, or getting involved far more, but we are happy with the school . . .

Similar sentiments were expressed by other parents. One felt:

> . . . if we are seeing consistent problems, and talking with other parents and them having the same problems, sure I would probably take the initiative . . . , [but] it's natural that as long as things run smooth, nobody is going to ruffle.

Another parent commented:

> If I had been displeased with the kinds of things that they [my children] were being exposed to in any way, then I probably would have been involved much more.

It has previously been reported (chapter 5) that, for most parents, judgments about the school were based largely on the progress of their children at school. Satisfactory progress and contented children were usually indicative of parent satisfaction. This relationship was again emphasized in this context by the parent who commented:

> . . . as long as I see in children . . . , that they are learning and that they receive, and are picking up, a good general knowledge as well . . . , yes, I'm willing to let the professionals carry on with their work.

Another parent who felt similarly also preferred to leave the major responsibility in the operation of the school to the professionals:

> . . . as long as the children seem to be learning, as long as the children seem to be happy . . . , and so long as I know a bit of what's going on [so] I can feel easy in my mind that I'm aware of what's happening to them.

One parent who was himself less than satisfied with his children's school, nevertheless, identified a similar relationship. He commented:

> . . . if they[my children] are getting good grades, they're talking to me about what they're doing and I like what I'm hearing, things sound like they're moving along pretty good, they [professional educators] can run the school, super.

Several parents related propensity to participate more with level of tolerance than with satisfaction, although the basic relationship still applied. Two were from the school where there was tension between parents and professional staff. One such parent explained:

> You tolerate certain things. I suppose because your child is happy and they enjoy going to school. When they're all very happy, and when they are just a bit lackadaisical, then you think, "Well should we or shouldn't we?" It's got to the point with this particular school when parents are saying, "Enough is enough, it's time for a change." I think we've tolerated this situation now for so many years . . .

Another parent from the same school also looked at his relationship with the school in terms of tolerance. For him, his tolerance was exhausted by his perception of lack of response from the school to his concerns. Tolerance ceased and action began:

> . . . when there appeared to be a lack of response. If they [the principal and staff] appear to be disinterested, non-professional, and the administration not to really understand what's going on within the school, then that's when we get more than exercised.

The Person and the Role

The propensity of parent respondents to participate in their local school was apparently related to certain personal characteristics and perceptions. Almost all parent respondents referred to their perception of the nature of the current role of parents in the school, to their personal confidence and knowledge, or to their individual levels of interest and family commitments in relation to their propensity to participate.

The nature of the role.

The way in which most parents perceived the current role of parents in their local school has already been reported in some detail (see chapter 4). Parents have no formal decision-making function in the school and their role is largely service and support oriented.

Almost half of the parent respondents, representative of all of the schools in the study, referred to the nature of the current role as a deterrent to their own greater involvement in the school. Five of the six parent respondents from the school where there was tension between the school principal and staff and parents referred to their limited role as a deterrent to their own greater involvement and also to the involvement of other parents in their community. Parents were critical of a role which was dominated by service and support components and reported that they would be more likely to become involved, or increase their level of involvement, if they could contribute in a more meaningful way. One parent currently not involved in his children's school commented:

> If there was something. If they wanted my involvement to go down and laminate pictures . . . , or shuffle books on the library shelf, no . . . , but if there were some policies or some decisions that parents as a group could make with professionals . . . , then I think yes, that would be something I could get involved in.

Another parent only sporadically involved in her children's school felt similarly:

> . . . where parents are being asked to participate it's generally in things that are not important to the real education of the child . . . . If I was able to contribute in a positive way to decisions that I felt affected the real education of my child . . . , yes, very likely I would.

Parents also perceived that the nature of their current role in the school constituted a significant deterrent to other parents not currently involved in their local school. One highly involved parent described how interest in the parent-advisory group in his school declined over time:

> First you get all the parents . . . , but everybody seems to have a different interpretation of what involvement means to the principal. To the principal and staff it means these people are going to raise money . . . , help out in the library . . . , help out in remedial classes . . . , come in and speak to the class . . . . So you get the people who have done it with their first child . . . , say, "I've had it, I'm not going to do it anymore." They feel they've just been used.

Another parent was convinced that given a substantial role, high interest in parent participation would be evident. He asserted:

> . . . given that ability [to participate in decision-making] . . . , we could elect five or ten or twenty members very quickly if they thought they could actually have an effective input into the system, and that is central to getting really active.
>
> One of two things are really essential to getting active participation, either absolute dissatisfaction or essentially absolute knowledge that you can have an affect . . .

The confidence to act. In excess of one third of parent respondents, including two parents classified as highly involved, reported a personal lack of confidence in their relationship with professional educators which they perceived constituted an important deterrent to their greater involvement and participation in their children's school.

Personal lack of confidence was reported to constrain parents in the extent to which they sought to exert influence in the operation of the school. One parent explained how her personal lack of confidence came to be emphasized and, eventually, to constrain her attempts to achieve change:

> I think sometimes it takes a lot of courage and a really strong belief and a sort of 'what you feel is right' to go straight to a teacher or principal . . . . I went to the school and voiced my concern, but nothing was ever changed. And then you lose confidence. I did anyway . . . . I think some people are aggressive and fighters. Others maybe lack that initial confidence to dissent . . . , and I think that is where I am.

Another parent described how he felt:

> I sometimes instigate something in my mind that I'm going to change, but by the time I go to the school, I fizzle. I don't know how to do it. Or I think it is not important enough . . . , and I don't carry it through . . . , if I did I would be feeling intimidated by the mere act of going through such a piddly little thing.

Implicit in parents' lack of confidence was uncertainty about how professional educators would react to parents' intrusion and an earnest desire not to "create waves" or "rock the boat". This concern was expressed by the parent who commented:

> In a lot of instances I haven't even gone to the principal because I just didn't want to make that big an issue out of it. I thought that my child was happy in the school, wasn't suffering in any way . . . , so I didn't feel that I wanted to rock the boat . . . , so I do hesitate in being involved as much as I sometimes would like to.

A similar concern about professional reaction to a request that her child be transferred to another class led this highly involved parent to say:

> I didn't like to do it . . . . I felt bad about that because possibly they would talk about me in the staffroom, which I imagine they do . . . . I just hope the teacher involved didn't hear about it.

Another parent who deliberately limited his contact with the school, especially in connection with the expression of opinion or concern, suggested:

> . . . it's a bit of a fear of the unknown because I don't know how [or] what kind of a reaction I'm going to get . . .

For some parents their lack of confidence was related to their perceived lack of qualifications or sufficient background knowledge to interact with professional educators on an equal basis. One such parent felt:

> . . . they [professional educators] are trained. They're the ones that go through university and they're the ones that understand the program . . . . I don't qualify to judge what they're teaching well . . . . That would stop me from trying to go too strong with an opinion.

Another parent who felt that his lack of knowledge of the school system was a major deterrent to his effective participation in the school explained:

> I don't think I'm a lot different than the average person, in that not having information at your fingertips you're a little intimidated to go in there . . . , because you could very quickly be put in a position where you haven't anything to stand on . . . . Never having been involved in that day-to-day operation, I don't know what goes on.

Personal commitments and interest. Half the parent respondents not classified as highly involved reported that time, family commitments, and other priorities limited the extent to which they had been involved in their children's school and were likely to influence the extent to which they could, or would, participate in the operation of the school if given that opportunity. One parent explained that although he would like to participate, the time commitment necessary would make that difficult for him:

> . . . being the breadwinner, that has to come first. We've got to have sufficient money in the household to survive and right now that sometimes creates problems.

Another parent only involved in the school to a minimum extent explained:

> I have a small child. Also I have a husband who is not very happy here in Canada . . . , which makes it sometimes very difficult at home to keep a happy father . . . . So family pressures have not given me the freedom or the energy that perhaps I could have used in other areas.

Other parents suggested that, in normal circumstances, involvement or participation in the local school was not a high priority. One parent admitted:

> . . . if I was to rank it I would have to say that my wife and our family as a unit come first, then the fact that I have to go away from that to make a living . . . , and thirdly would be things peripheral to that, either my hobbies or the kids' hobbies . . . . But the school, that kind of thing would have to come after that. The only way the priority would change . . . , is if a specific item came up, which to date hasn't happened.

The one highly involved parent to refer to other priorities was a parent who had recently ended her formal association with the school. She explained:

> I was highly involved for five years . . . . I was tired and I started working in that time too, so being at the school all the time wasn't my only priority in life after that . . . , I was tired. I had had enough.

While no parent respondents reported anything but high interest in their children's education and the well-being of their children at school, there was widespread criticism of parents in general, especially by parents who considered themselves to be highly involved. Parents in general were commonly defined as displaying a lack of interest and a lack of caring in their children's education and their children's school and were accused of failing to do their part towards the effective operation of the school. One highly involved parent complained that lack of involvement was:

> . . . just lack of interest. "Our children go to school and that's what schools are for, to look after them . . . . Don't call us, we'll call you."

Another parent who felt similarly commented:

> . . . I think it's a lack of caring. There are a lot of parents who just can't be bothered . . . . "Why do I need to become involved because I know that you are going to be there all the time. If I want something, I'll just go ahead and ask you . . . , so I don't need to be involved."

School Advisory Experience and Propensity to Participate

There was some indication that present or recent past experience on a formal advisory body was related to parents' propensity to participate in the operation of their children's school.

Four of the six highly involved parents reported a relationship between their desire and felt need to participate and their membership on the parent-advisory body at their children's school. Another highly involved parent reported a greater confidence and willingness to accept extra responsibility in the school, including a shared decision-making function, although she expressed little desire to do so. In addition, two of the three other parent respondents from the school with the most formal parent-advisory structure also related advisory council membership to greater propensity to participate. While the advisory structure at a third school in the study was much less formal, even casual in its operation, it nevertheless did offer an opportunity for parents to contribute if they so desired. Two parent respondents from that school also drew attention to their wish to participate as a consequence of their regular attendance at those meetings.

Highly involved parents conceptualized the existence of a process whereby their membership of an advisory body gave them access to information concerning the operation of the school that was previously unavailable and resulted in their accumulation of a bank of knowledge relating to the operation of the school as a consequence. Increased knowledge formed the basis for opinions and the desire to participate in decision-making. One parent explained:

> . . . it [advisory body membership] makes you more knowledgeable in what's going on within the organization, and the knowledge itself gives you the ability on your own as to where you think it [the school] ought to be going. It automatically follows, if you decide what ought to be going on, then you'd like to influence it in that direction.

A similar process was suggested by the highly involved parent who said, "It [advisory body membership] shows parents how to become involved . . . "

FACTORS RELATED TO PROPENSITY TO PARTICIPATE: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

Analysis of the data resulted in the identification of four factors which professional educators perceived to be related to parents' propensity to become involved and to participate in the operation of their local school. The four factors were: (1) the welfare of their children, (2) the influence of professional educators, (3) satisfaction with the school, and (4) the person and the role.

The Welfare of their Children

Fourteen of the twenty professional educator respondents related parents' propensity to become actively involved in the operation of the school to the level of parent interest and concern for the educational and personal well-being of their children at school. Parents were perceived to be motivated to become involved and to seek the opportunity to participate by their strong belief that this action would have positive outcomes for their children. In the view of one principal:

> I firmly believe that parents who are most involved in the activities of the school believe that their children will benefit in some way from that involvement. They feel that their children will receive more attention from teachers, that they themselves will have a better relationship with the teachers and that the final result will be a higher performance from their children.

This view was shared by the teacher who stated:

> I have no doubt that most parents I see in the school firmly believe that their children benefit from them being known in the school.

One teacher commented:

> It [involvement] comes from a personal concern for their child , . . . what's happening to their child . . . . Some of them [parents] may be doing it for the general benefit of the system or the school, but it's more likely coming from a basic personal position.

Involved parents were perceived to place a high value on education and to desire to be closely involved with the education of their children. This principal explained:

> . . . some people want to be very much involved in their child's education. I think these are the people that come into the L.A.C. [kindergarten Local Advisory Committee], are willing to become part of it, are willing to become part of the school's on-going thing . . . . They want to be involved, maybe because this is one way they are able to see what is happening, what their children are doing and to work with the people who are working with their children.

All five respondents from the school where tension existed between the professional staff and parents saw concern for their children's education as the basic and overriding motive for parent involvement and attempts to participate in the operation of the school. One teacher from that school asserted:

> They want the best for their kids. It's not that they're political or think that they should be running the school, or someone who missed the boat by not being a teacher. I think it's all because of the kids.

Professional educators alluded to certain characteristics of involved parents. Involved parents were perceived not only to have a high interest in education, but also to have definite views about the form that education should take. One teacher observed:

> I think they [involved parents] have an interest in what the school is doing or not doing; they have an

> idea of what education should be, and that't what they would like for their child -- sometimes in conflict with what the school is doing.

The objective of involved parents to have the school operate in accordance with their own philosophy was also the basis of this teacher's comment:

> . . . they [interested parents] would like to see things changed for their own children. Perhaps they see that their own child could do more so they like to push for the philosophy to be changed, the direction to be taken [changed] . . .

The Influence of Professional Educators

Professional educators themselves were perceived to constitute a significant influence on parents' propensity to become involved or participate in their local school. Professional educators indicated that parents' propensity to become actively involved may be influenced by the way in which parents defined professional educators' attitudes toward parents and, for some parents, by the possible existence of a communication barrier between parents and professional educators based upon some kind of professional-lay distinction.

The attitude of professional educators.

Fifteen of the twenty professional educator respondents referred to the likely influence of professional educators' attitudes toward parents in the school on parents' propensity to become involved and participate. Half of the professional respondents suggested that the attitudes of their colleagues could be negative towards parents and, accordingly, act as a deterrent to greater parent involvement and participation in schools. Reference to the existence of a proportion of professional educators who were antagonistic to parent involvement in the school was common. One teacher commented:

> . . . I still meet a lot of people [professional educators] who say, "What do they need to know that for?" It seems to be teachers who are not confident in what they are doing, who do not know why . . . . Those are the teachers who resent having to justify anything to anyone. And those people still ridicule parents.

Professional educators antagonistic to parents were also commented upon by the teacher who felt:

> . . . there are still some professionals in the school system, office people, administration, whatever, there's still a feeling of us and them, and as long as there's that feeling people are going to get that message. I don't think we can hide that.

The fact that some parents would perceive negative attitudes towards them was not a surprise to the teacher who commented:

> I think that's communicated quite strongly in some instances, just by the behaviors. For example, not attending P.T.A.'s is quite a strong indication after some time that we really don't care, we don't want to be bothered or we really don't want to hear about what you have to say . . .

Another teacher who was not surprised that her attitude might be interpreted negatively commented:

> Of course not, [I would prefer not to have parents in my classroom] I mean it is going to put me out. If they come even just to sit and watch I've got to take away [time from teaching]. Even if it's just two minutes to talk to them, find them a place to sit and see if they're comfortable.

In commenting on his perception of the profession in general, and their attitude to parents in the school, one teacher suggested:

> I think we do a lot of going through the motions, maybe because we haven't had enough positive experiences. Maybe we just haven't opened ourselves up to it enough.

Other professional educators, approximately one-third, perceived professional educators' attitudes toward parents in the school to be positive and the consequent influence to be in the direction of encouraging parent involvement. The principal of one school noted that his school received a 100% rating in the 1983 Edmonton Public School Board survey of parents concerning the extent to which parents felt welcome in the school. He suggested that was indicative of positive parent perceptions of professional attitudes towards parents:

> We have a lot of events going on within the school where parents are invited in. Fairly frequently throughout the year they are invited to something . . . , and I think just the fact,even if they don't take up the invitation, just the fact that they are asked to come in, I think it is maybe significant . . .

A similar position was adopted by the teacher who also felt that things the school did were indicative of positive professional educator attitudes towards parents:

> . . . whether it's an open-house kind of thing or a tea or just drop in any time or call me if there's anything you want to know . . . , concerts that go on within the school, I think all these things have helped make parents feel that they're always welcome within a school.

Professional-lay communication. Almost half of the professional educator respondents referred to the existence of some kind of communication barrier between professional educators and parents possibly based upon a perceived professional-lay distinction between them. The notion was that professional educators and parents often experienced difficulty in communicating with each other, that their interaction was often strained, and that neither party was able to relax and be frank and open with the other. Whether due to perceived status differences between them, to mutual defensiveness, or a consequence of unfamiliarity with the other's point of view, the barrier was seen to exist and to deter some parents from greater involvement and participation in the school.

For some of those professional educators, the hesitancy in the interaction was on the parents' side. One teacher who felt that hesitancy explained:

> I think it is there, I really do. I find when the parents come in to see me, for example at first interview time, they've been really hesitant and very apprehensive and nervous of what I'm going to say . . . . There is still that -- that person's there and I'm here . . . . I think probably because as a parent that emotional involvement you have for that little person in the middle is so very strong . . .

A teacher who felt similarly commented:

> Yes, I think they [parents] feel very inhibited coming into a school, and it's too bad they do because some of the people that maybe don't have a degree [and] aren't classified as being professional have more to offer than some of the professionals . . . . Yes, I think that's a deterrent . . . , but I think that's the way society's pushed it on people that you've got a piece of paper so you're better than this guy who hasn't gone to university.

Parent reluctance in the professional educator-parent relationship was also felt by the teacher who suggested:

> . . . my analogy for that would be I live in mortal fear of policemen. Every time I pass one, I'm totally innocent and done nothing wrong, but I start shaking . . . , and some parents feel the same way about teachers, maybe because of past experiences [or] their own situation at school.

Other of the professional educators who felt the existence of this communication barrier placed much of the responsibility for its continued existence on professional educators. One teacher felt the barrier was a consequence of:

> . . . the failure of the staff, I think, to feel that they can let go of control. I think a great deal of wall-building is done in schools, and I think it's a kind of maturity that you have to reach . . . . It took me a long time to reach that point and to realize that even if they [parents] were critical, I wasn't threatened.

Other teachers also saw the insecurity of professional educators as responsible for the communication barrier. One teacher suggested:

> . . . a lot of teachers have gone through a lot of pain to justify that they are indeed professionals; and like the doctor doesn't take advice from his patients, we should not take advice from our clients. I see and hear a lot of teachers trying to justify the fact that they are professionals.

Professional educators' desire for professional status was also the basis of this teacher's explanation for the continued existence of communication problems between parents and professional educators:

> I think teachers have contributed to it a lot. We fought very hard to be taken seriously as a profession. We want to be rated up there with the doctors and lawyers and everyone else, and maybe we have taken it too far . . . . We often get on our high horses and say, "But I'm a teacher, I don't have to do that. What business do they have telling me what I should be doing."

An equal number of professional educator respondents rejected the notion that a communication barrier based on a professional-lay distinction still existed or that parents may be deterred from greater involvement and participation because of such a barrier. As one teacher commented:

> . . . everybody's an educationalist . . . . People read articles in popular magazines, they read books, they hear other people, they see it on television . . . . They have pretty strong ideas of what they would like to see happening. I don't see any reverence towards the teaching profession.

Another teacher who concurred with those sentiments added:

> . . . I don't know if many people look upon teachers as professionals. I don't think it comes out at all. Whether people are better educated now or whether we are just not regarded as professional as we would like to be. So I just don't see it at all.

Satisfaction with the School

In excess of two-thirds of the professional educator respondents, representative of all four schools in the study, perceived parents' general satisfaction with the school to be an important deterrent to greater parent involvement and participation in the operation of the school. Professional educators perceived a relationship between parents' general satisfaction with the school and a diminished felt need to participate. As one teacher commented, most parents feel:

> "You're doing a great job, keep it up . . . , you don't need me. You're doing the job fine, you don't need me to come and help you make decisions, help you run the school."

Professional educators felt that while parents were basically satisfied with the school they preferred to leave the operation of the school to professionals. According to one principal:

> As long as they [parents] perceive the school is doing an adequate job with their children they say, "I'll let you do your job, I'll do mine" . . . . I think that they will tend to leave it alone.

The belief that satisfied parents preferred to leave most school decision-making with professional educators was shared by this teacher who felt:

> I've got a lot of mum's I don't see, and they're the ones that I get notes from saying, "I like what's going on." They feel quite comfortable to trust me. I guess that's the big issue, to trust me to know maybe, what's the right thing . . .

Principals and teachers felt that most parents were motivated to participate only when they were unhappy with aspects of the school's operation, and that satisfaction was usually associated with the educational progress of their own children. Implicit in that assumption was the belief that the "silent majority" was basically happy with the school, and that professional educators could rely on being informed if parent satisfaction should decline. One principal was of the opinion that:

> . . . the only time that they [parents] are going to come screaming into the school is if they're unhappy. Generally if they're unhappy then you hear about it.

That view was shared by the teacher who commented:

> I assume for the most part, parents are satisfied. Probably in everyone there are areas of concern, but there's a grape-vine system and we usually hear one way or the other.

Professional educators suggested that so long as the school personnel operated within certain limits, explicitly or implicitly imposed by parents, there was likely to be little parent desire or felt need to participate. Parents were perceived to have limits which, if exceeded by actions of the school principal or staff, would be likely to stimulate greater desire and felt need to participate. One principal suggested that only when parents' limits were exceeded:

> . . . would you have a large amount of complaints from varied sources and through varied channels, and you would very quickly find out.

Another principal also saw certain limits which parents imposed that guided parents in their relations with the school. He felt that parents said, in effect:

> Here are the boundaries that we accept and as long as you operate within those boundaries we're quite content to let you keep going. When things get out of those boundaries, then you're going to hear from us.

The Person and the Role

Professional educators identified constraints imposed by family and employment commitments, and a lack of personal confidence in parents' relations with professional educators and the school environment as deterrents to greater parent involvement and participation in the school.

Personal commitments. There was widespread professional educator support for the view that many parents were seriously constrained in their ability and willingness to become more actively involved in the operation of the school as a consequence of family and employment commitments. Fourteen of the twenty professional educator respondents referred to those commitments as a deterrent to greater parent involvement and participation. One teacher commented that the lack of parent involvement was a reflection of:

> . . . the reality of the situation. If they [parents] have the time and the energy, they will tend to be [involved]. Otherwise, no, let someone else worry about that. I have the bills and the kids.

Pressure of time was considered a serious limit to the extent to which parents could devote themselves to the school. One teacher expressed a commonly held view in stating:

> . . . time is a real factor, I know. A lot of parents would probably be more interested and show more interest if both parents weren't holding down jobs . . . , [they] just can't be as involved as they would like to be.

Another teacher who concurred with that opinion suggested:

> . . . it is the time factor. If you have working parents, both parents are working, that takes out their daytime hours. Many feel their remaining time would be more profitably spent with their children rather than going to a meeting.

Closely related to time pressures, are pressures of employment and life in general. Common reference was made to what principals and teachers described as "difficult economic and changing social times" and the impact these had on parents' propensity to participate. As one teacher reflected:

> . . . well there are other problems. If you think back quite a few years you know, it was how they [children]

> did in school and whether they went to university that was a big deal. Now it's whether my marriage stays together, whether I can get the mortgage paid on time. It all makes a big difference.

A principal who felt similarly commented:

> . . . they [parents] just work. Mum and dad working from early morning until late at night . . . , they are just so busy with the daily necessity of survival that they can't [be involved].

The confidence to act. More than half the professional educator respondents saw a relationship between a parent's confidence in relating to school personnel and being in the school environment and their propensity to become involved and participate in the school. Parents' lack of confidence in the school context was perceived to be a real phenomenon for many parents and to constitute a significant limitation to those parents. While involved parents were perceived to be confident in the school and in their dealings with the school principal and staff, many parents who were not currently involved were perceived to lack that confidence and to limit their involvement and participation in the school as a result. One teacher who recognized the difficulties faced by many parents stated:

> I think it's pretty serious. I think it's really very, very difficult for people to come in and approach the school principal or a teacher.

Some parents were perceived to lack the self-esteem necessary to be comfortable in strange surroundings. However, as one teacher pointed out, to come into a school is no easy task. She explained:

> I think of myself, for example, going into a hospital and saying, "Hi, I'm Fred Patient's mother. What would you like me to do to participate?" That would take some nerve on my part.

Other parents were perceived to have some feeling of inferiority towards professional educators. One teacher commented in that respect:

> . . . the factor that I think is most important is that they [parents] feel inferior . . . , [that] they don't have the education to talk to teachers . . . , they are worried about what the teacher will think of this person.

A similar opinion was expressed by the teacher who suggested:

> Maybe some people are intimidated . . . . I guess that happens. Anybody can become intimidated if they feel the people are above them or whatever . . . . I think it's just human nature.

For other professional educators, parents' lack of confidence results from the traditional parent-professional relationship of earlier years. As one teacher noted, "From childhood you don't talk to the principal and that's that." Another teacher suggested:

> There are a lot of parents out there that have had bad feelings about schools, even from when they were going to school. They don't know what it [school] is about and how it runs. So when they come in they feel they must make an appointment or they feel nervous about coming in and sort of voicing an opinion.

The nature of the role. Most professional educator respondents were apparently satisfied that the nature of the current role opportunities for parents in the school was not a significant deterrent to greater parent involvement and participation in the school. Half the professional educator respondents made no reference to the nature of the current role of parents in the school in that context. Of those that did mention the role, no respondents saw it as a widespread deterrent. While it was acknowledged that some parents may have been deterred by the limited range of options available to them in their activities in the school, in general, parents were perceived to be satisfied with their role and content to focus their involvement on service and support activities.

ISSUES AND THE DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

> 4.2 What types of issues do parents and professional educators report are most likely to generate high parent desire to participate in local school decision-making?

Parent respondents reported that in general they make infrequent demands upon school personnel. Some parents are hesitant about even approaching the school principal or teachers with particular concerns or views. It is clear, however, that parents constitute a substantial reservoir of potential energy that is likely to be marshalled in the event that issues arise which parents perceive as demanding their attention.

Parents found it difficult to define, with any precision, the types or characteristics of issues that were likely to generate a strong desire to participate. However, using examples of issues reported by parents as ones in which they have become actively involved, issues most likely to stimulate parent action were: (1) issues with important ultimate consequences for their children, (2) issues that generate controversy, and (3) issues perceived to threaten the basic operation, direction, or purpose of the school.

The Ultimate Consequences for Children

Fundamental to most attempts to influence decision-makers was parents' perception of the ultimate consequences of non-action for the educational and personal well-being of their children. As one parent observed:

> . . . [it is] the ultimate affect on your child, the end result . . . , if you could see it snowballing into something that could really affect the child . . .

A similar view was expressed by the parent who explained:

> . . . it's what the ultimate consequences are if the issue is swept aside. To what extent is it going to be important to the child. I want for my child, and for the children in that school, a really positive learning environment and if there is something obviously distracting from what could be possible, that is an issue that should be dealt with.

The most common example of such an issue concerned teachers perceived by parents to be incompetent or unsuitable. One parent recalled she was stimulated to act when:

> . . . my oldest son was in grade two/three and they had a very incompetent teacher. She had a split grade and all she was doing was giving the kids mimeo sheets . . . . My son was doing very poorly. I had to do something.

For another parent the use of corporal punishment stimulated her to decide to act:

> He [the principal] uses the strap and I had a phone call from him a couple of weeks ago about my oldest son in grade two. He said that if he [my son] was in his office again, it will be corporal punishment . . . . I would hate to go against the principal . . . , but I don't think that teachers should be strapping children . . . . I don't know what I will do next, but I will find it.

Controversial Issues

Issues perceived as controversial in nature, or likely to become so, are also more likely to stimulate parents' interest and involvement. As one parent observed:

> Certain issues seem to hit a certain cord in people -- certainly sex education, money and discipline. They are three all-encompassing areas in the running of the school.

Language issues are also reported to be likely to generate interest because of their propensity to promote polar opinions. One parent recalled the high interest generated by a proposal to introduce a bi-lingual program at his children's school. He noted:

> . . . meetings are not well attended in the most part, only when there is a critical issue, then interest seems to spread. There was a meeting that we had three years ago where we filled the gymnasium. I bet we had 300. It was when the question of having a French immersion program [arose] . . . . There was a whole group of us who were pushing for a French program. There were a whole group on the other side who wanted strictly English.

A parent of children attending a different school also referred to a language issue as one which motivated her to become involved. She recalled:

> . . . [it was] the intensity of the issue. We had educators from all parts of Canada come to talk to us . . . . We were all gung-ho, myself included, to have this program in the school.

Issues Fundamental to the School

Some issues were perceived by parents to be fundamental to the continued operation or direction of the school, and to demand parents' attention on that basis. These were issues basic to parents' conception of the purpose of the school; issues likely to have a significant impact on the direction and operation of the school. One parent recalled such an issue that stimulated her involvement:

> A few years ago parents were worried about the school becoming a downtown school. We were going to lose teachers . . . , and it was quite frightening . . . . The parents did band together then and there was the usual big protest . . . . That particular issue was quite dramatic . . . , it raised a lot of heat in the hole . . . , so you more or less had to be jumping in and be involved.

Another example concerned the imminent transfer of the school's principal. Parents had become convinced that the departure of the principal represented a serious threat to the continued operation of the school in its current form, and high interest was generated in the selection of a new principal. One parent related her experience:

> . . . I attended a huge meeting where they [parents and school board representatives] were discussing who, and what kind of principal, we were going to get. That's really important.

In another instance a parent was motivated towards intense activity when she perceived an attempt by other parents to change the basic educational philosophy and approach of her child's school:

> . . . there was a group that was trying to have it [the school] made into more of a free school, where they don't really have a set curriculum and they don't really have control. I said, "That's not going to work for my children." I got involved because we violently objected to that type of a change . . . . For me it would have meant that I couldn't have sent my children to the school . . .

ISSUES AND THE DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES

While most professional educators were unable to be specific in their definition of the most volatile types of issues, their comments suggested that issues most likely to generate widespread desire to participate were: (1) issues judged by parents to have a particular relevance to the well-being of their children, (2) issues judged by parents to be basic to the operation of the school, and (3) issues that are controversial or have become public. These categories are almost identical to those parents reported to be most likely to stimulate strong parent desire to participate. The views of both groups are summarized in Table 6.0.

Table 6.0

Issues Likely to Generate Strong Parent Desire to Participate

Parents	Professional Educators
1. Issues judged to have important ultimate consequences for their own children.	1. Issues judged by parents to have a particular relevance to the well-being of their own children.
2. Issues perceived to be controversial in nature, or likely to become so.	2. Issues that are controversial in nature or have become public.
3. Issues perceived to threaten the basic operation, direction, or purpose of the school.	3. Issues perceived by parents to threaten the basic operation, direction, or purpose of the school.

The Ultimate Consequences for Children

Most professional educators felt that the basic motivation for parent involvement and attempts to participate in the school was the intellectual, physical or social well-being of their own children. Accordingly, issues perceived by parents to be intimately related to the present, or future, well-being of their children were judged by professional educators to be issues most likely to generate a high parent interest in participation. Parent participation was not regarded as altruistic by professional educators. As one teacher observed:

> I honestly have never experienced an issue involving people [whose children] were not intimately involved in the problem.

The primacy of the welfare of their own children as motivation for parent involvement and participation was expressed by professional educators time and time again. In the words of one teacher:

> . . . it's only important of course, if their child is involved. I think that's a requirement. Whatever is happening must be happening to their child . . . , something that they don't feel good about that's happening to their child . . . , that will really make it a big issue.

Issues Fundamental to the School

Professional educators perceived that parents differentiated between issues they defined as routine and issues which were judged by parents to have a fundamental relevance to the operation of the school. Some issues are defined by parents to have implications for the basic structure, method of operation or philosophical direction of the school. It was these issues which were most likely to generate parent activity. As one principal observed, "I think if you can keep the status quo you probably won't get a lot of interest stirred up."

One principal identified the issue of his departure from the school, and the selection of a new principal, as an issue which was judged by parents to be a matter of fundamental importance to the school and, hence, one which generated widespread parent interest and attempts to participate. He recalled:

> . . . one of our meetings that was really well attended was on the topic of my replacement . . . , standing-room only that meeting. The concerns were, "We want somebody who will carry on the program, who will involve us, who will let us know" . . . . It was very clear that night. They were telling my boss, "Be careful with your selection."

Concern over a possible change to the basic structure and style of the school was also identified by another principal as an issue that motivated high levels of parent interest and activity. He commented:

> . . . a lot of interest developed in what we were going to do with the school as a whole . . . , which programs were we going to destroy. Their [parents] fear was that we would destroy what we had. By upsetting the mix we would tend to destroy all the feelings we have within the school.

The decision to terminate an English language kindergarten was another example of an issue defined by parents to be of fundamental importance to the basic direction of the school and, therefore, to the well-being of their children. The issue attracted widespread parent interest. One teacher explained:

> . . . we were told we had to cancel our English kindergarten. Well, in a three language school, the major language in the province is English, politically it doesn't sit too well for English to suddenly be chopped out of the school . . . , that meeting was not peaches and cream.

Controversial or Public Issues

Professional educator respondents also identified issues that were controversial in nature, or which became controversial as a consequence of being subjected to public debate, as issues likely to generate parent interest in participation. One principal commented in this respect:

> Parents get involved deeply over controversial issues, whether it's French, as it was in this school when the community really got involved, [or] sex education would be another that would really stimulate them.

On the impact of publicity on levels of parent interest and activity, one teacher observed:

> I think if a parent was to raise a question and to do it publicly, we would immediately find others looking at our program . . . . They [issues] do generate more emotion if they are public and certainly they are less likely to be solved pleasantly if they are public. People tend to become entrenched in their positions.

Other respondents referred to the role of the media in raising and highlighting particular issues. It was alleged that, often, parent interest and activity in a particular issue was encouraged by reading or hearing about it, and that parents were then motivated to raise the issue in connection with their own children or their children's school. An example of this process in action was given by the principal who commented:

> Somebody says, "Kids' reading skills are the pits." O.K., that hits the fan, and then everyone starts worrying about that particular skill in their children.

Other issues were perceived to become topical at certain times due at least partly to media coverage. One teacher suggested:

> For instance, right now gifted programs, enrichment programs are topical, in the news, and of course everyone is worried about whether the gifted child is going to be taken care of. They think their child is gifted.

FACTORS RELATED TO PARENT PROPENSITY TO PARTICIPATE: A SYNTHESIS

There were substantial areas of agreement between parents and professional educators regarding factors which were likely to be related to parents' propensity to become involved and participate in their local school. There were also some important differences evident. Factors related to parents' propensity to participate are summarized in Table 6.1.

Both groups recognized the primacy of parents' interest in the educational welfare of their children as an underlying motivation for involvement and participation. Involved parents were defined as highly interested in education and confident that their active interest in the school would have important benefits for the educational and personal development of their children. Even the professional respondents from the school where there was tension between school personnel and parents agreed that the primary motivation for the parents' activity was concern for the educational well-being of their children.

Table 6.1

Factors Related to Parent Propensity to Participate

Parents	Professional Educators
1. The welfare of their children. . the quality of the education . the monitoring function . benefits for children	1. The welfare of their children.
2. Particular issues.	2. The influence of professional educators. . attitudes of professional educators . professional-lay communication
3. Influence of professional educators. . attitudes of professional educators . quality of the school principal . confidence in the profession	3. Satisfaction with the school.
4. Satisfaction with the school.	4. The person and the role. . personal commitments. . the confidence to act
5. The person and the role. . the nature of the role . the confidence to act . personal commitments and interest.	
6. School advisory experience.	

There was substantial commonality also in the expressed conviction that parents' satisfaction with the school was related to their propensity to become involved and participate. Almost all parent respondents referred to the concept of general satisfaction in discussing their propensity to become actively involved. High levels of satisfaction apparently diminished parents' felt need and desire to participate. Conversely, dissatisfied parents were more likely to seek an influential and authoritative role in the school. Professional educators saw a similar relationship and perceived that parent satisfaction was likely to constitute an important deterrent to greater involvement and participation. Professional educators felt the existence of parent-imposed limits on their freedom of action. While those limits were respected, a diminished parent desire to participate could be expected.

Parents and professional educators identified the influence of professional educators themselves as an important influence on parents' propensity to become involved or participate in the school. Some similarity, and important differences, were evident concerning the nature of that influence. There was common agreement that professional educators' attitudes toward parents in the school, communicated to parents by the language and actions of school personnel, were likely to be an important influence on parents' propensity to become involved or participate. While parents and professional educators were divided as to the direction of that influence, there was little disagreement concerning its importance. Parents also referred to the importance of their judgment of the quality of the principal and their level of confidence in the profession as a whole on their felt need and desire to participate. A principal defined as competent, open and receptive to the needs and concerns of parents and high levels of confidence in the profession as a whole were seen as likely to diminish parents' felt need and desire to participate. Professional educators were apparently less certain of parents' confidence in the profession as a whole and this factor was not identified as important in influencing parents' propensity to participate. Nor was the nature of parents' judgment concerning the capacity of the school principal and staff.

Professional educators did refer, however, to the concept of a communication barrier between parents and school personnel, possibly based upon some kind of professional-lay distinction. For half of the professional respondents this barrier still existed and was likely to deter some parents in their relations with the school and limit their propensity to become more actively involved with its operation. Parents apparently felt that such a barrier either did not exist or was not a significant deterrent to their involvement or participation in the school.

Similarity and important differences were evident, also, in the identification of certain personal influences related to propensity to become involved or participate in the school. Both groups related that propensity to the level of constraint imposed upon parents by family and employment commitments. Professional educators saw these constraints as a particularly important deterrent. Parent respondents, especially highly involved parents, were less deterred by time, family and employment commitments than they perceived parents in general to be. Parents in general were also commonly defined by parent respondents as disinterested and uncaring in their attitude towards involvement and participation in the school.

Lack of confidence in their relations with school personnel was also identified by a substantial proportion of parents and professional educators as a real and common phenomenon for many parents. Parents not highly involved in the school were commonly felt to be deterred from greater involvement and participation as a consequence of this lack of personal confidence.

Almost half of the parent respondents reported being deterred from greater involvement and attempts to participate by the nature of their current role opportunities in the school. The current role, dominated by service and support components, was seen by these parents to discourage parents who desired a more purposeful, stimulating, and influential role in the school. Professional educators did not see the current role of parents as a deterrent to most parents.

For some parents, particularly parents classified as highly involved or parents who defined themselves as highly involved, interest and concern with their children's education was transformed into active involvement and attempts to participate by a particular event or events related to the school or their children's education. For these parents, it was this event or events that stimulated initial involvement, involvement that was often maintained over the period of their children's attendance at the school.

There was substantial support for the existence of some relationship between a parent's present or recent past experience on a parent-advisory body at their children's school and parents' propensity to participate in the operation of the school. Most highly involved parents felt they were able to accumulate greater knowledge and information about the operation of the school as a consequence of their membership on the advisory body and that knowledge motivated them to seek a share in decisions related to the operation of the school. This relationship was not evident to most professional educators.

There was close agreement between parents and professional educators concerning issues most likely to generate a strong parent desire to participate. Issues perceived by parents to have particular relevance to the well-being of their children, issues judged to threaten the basic direction and purpose of the school and issues that were controversial in nature or became so as a consequence of public debate were perceived by both groups as likely to generate strong parent desire to participate.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter findings have been presented and discussed concerning factors related to parents' propensity to become involved and participate in the operation of their local school. A number of factors have been described. It is evident that individual propensity to become actively involved in the operation of the school is the result of some complex, interactive effect of those factors. The influence of a particular factor is likely to vary for parents as a whole, and for individual parents, according to time, circumstances, and the situation. While there are significant differences in the factors reported by parent and professional educator respondents, there is also substantial similarity suggesting the possibility of fundamental or underlying influences upon parents' propensity to participate. In considering the findings presented in this chapter, several key findings and themes can be emphasized.

The Primacy of Children's Welfare

It was evident that the underlying motive for parents' involvement and participation in their local school was the educational, social and personal welfare of their individual children. Parents apparently became involved, and attempted to influence decision-makers, in the belief that their actions would be positively related to their children's welfare. Parents believed that by being demonstrably involved in their children's school important benefits were likely to accrue to their children in terms of the educational opportunities afforded and in the educational, social, and personal successes achieved. Principals and teachers generally shared that belief. They saw greater parent involvement in the school leading to increased parent knowledge and understanding of the school and, as a consequence, higher levels of parent support for the activities of school personnel and more positive student attitudes toward learning. Parent involvement was encouraged by most professional educators.

The welfare of their own children was also the basis for other influences on parents' propensity to participate. Parents' propensity to participate has been reported as being related to parents' satisfaction with the school. The school progress and personal welfare of their individual children was the most commonly used means of evaluating the school and coming to a personal judgment concerning general satisfaction.

For some parents, involvement and participation was precipitated by a particular event or issue. Again the major criteria used by parents in the assessment of the importance of a particular issue were the implications of the issue for the welfare of their own children. While some parents, a small minority, made passing reference to the welfare of the school population as a whole, such a reference was rare. Although some parents would, no doubt, see the general welfare as a positive side-benefit of their involvement and participation, parent altruism was rare and obviously constituted a secondary consideration.

Considering the primacy of the welfare of their own children as the motivation for parent involvement and participation, parents' activity in the school, and their propensity to participate, is likely to peak and decline in accordance with their children's attendance at school.

The Influence of the School Principal and Staff

In considering factors related to parents' propensity to become involved and participate in their local school, it is clear that the role of the school principal and staff can hardly be over-emphasized. The school constitutes a strange and foreign environment for most parents. Many have not been in a school since being a student themselves and, often, student memories and experiences are negative. For many parents, the traditional formality of teacher-parent relationships still apply. Parents have reported a widespread lack of confidence in their relations with professional educators, even in being in the school environment. Parents were often uncertain how they would be received by the principal and staff and many expressed the desire not to "create waves". Many parents are hesitant and reluctant in the school environment. While anxious to support their children, they often lack the confidence and assurance to initiate the necessary contact and communication with school personnel. A substantial proportion of professional educators have referred to the continuing existence of a communication barrier between professional educators and parents which was seen to constrain some parents in their relations with school personnel.

Principals and teachers convey their attitude towards parents in the school by the way in which they speak and act, by their general demeanor towards parents, and by the role-opportunities parents are offered in the school. Most parents, already hesitant, are likely to be highly sensitive to those signals and to respond accordingly. Consciously or unconsciously, the school principal and staff carry a substantial burden. To a considerable extent the way in which parents feel about their local school, and their likelihood of becoming involved or participating in its operation, will depend on the principal and staff members of the school.

Parent Satisfaction and the Propensity to Participate

Parents have referred to the importance of their feelings of general satisfaction with the school and to the way in which this feeling is associated with their propensity to participate in its operation. It was evident that, for most parents, general satisfaction was associated with a diminished felt need and desire to participate.

Parents make judgments about the school after forming opinions about its performance. This judgment was most closely related to the progress and general welfare of their own children at school. Judgments were also made about the quality of the school principal and staff, about their openness and receptivity to parents' approaches, and about their responsiveness to their needs and concerns. On the basis of those judgments parents assume a level of satisfaction with the school. The assumption of general satisfaction, satisfaction within certain parameters adopted by individual parents, most often resulted in a diminished propensity to participate. The basic expectations of parents who are generally satisfied are being met. The progress of their children is satisfactory and professional educators, assumed by most parents to be competent and diligent, have the education of their children in hand. The need for parents to act is, therefore, substantially reduced. However, because parents' judgments are subjective in nature, and because circumstances and situations change, parent satisfaction has a dynamic quality and propensity to participate may also vary over time.

The concept that parents might or should, as a matter of course, participate in the operation of the school was seldom raised by parent respondents. Participation was most commonly referred to in the context of problems, dissatisfaction, or the need for change.

Professional educators, too, referred to the importance of the concept of general satisfaction and perceived a similar relationship between parents' general satisfaction and a diminished desire to participate. Professional educators referred to the existence of explicit or implicit parent-imposed limits which guided their decision-making in the school. While those limits were recognized and respected, professional educators predicted general satisfaction and limited parent desire to participate.

Highly Involved Parents

It has already been reported in the presentation of the findings that highly involved parents differed from most other parents in their attitudes toward the participation of parents in the school decision-making process (see chapter 5). That difference has been confirmed in the findings presented in this chapter concerning parents' propensity to participate. While all parent respondents reported a high level of interest and concern for the educational welfare of their children, for highly involved parents that interest and concern has been translated into active involvement and attempts or desire to participate in the operation of the school.

Most highly involved parents were able to trace their initial decision to seek to influence school decision-makers to a particular issue related to the school or the educational well-being of their children. This issue was defined as the spark that ignited an active interest in participating in the school which has generally been maintained. Having become involved, the existence of a formal parent-advisory structure facilitated the further development of that involvement. Membership on that body in an executive position allowed the parents access to knowledge and information that would not normally have been readily available to them. Knowledge and information facilitated the formation of opinions on matters concerning the operation of the school. The knowledge and opinions together promoted an increased desire to participate in the decision-making process.

For highly involved parents access to information, combined with a greater familiarity with the way in which the school operated and confidence in dealing with school personnel, was related to their propensity to participate in the operation of the school.

CHAPTER 7

THE FINDINGS AND SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter consists of two major sections: (1) a discussion of the major findings in relation to the literature, and (2) the presentation of some theoretical considerations based on the findings of the study and the review of the literature.

THE MAJOR FINDINGS AND THE LITERATURE

In the following section, the major findings of the study are discussed and their relationship with the literature is examined.

The Nature of Parents' Current Role

A distinction is often made in the literature (Warren, 1977; Steinberg, 1977) between the concepts of involvement and participation. That distinction was made also in the conduct of this study. Involvement is defined as being essentially supportive and favorable in orientation. The process may include some mechanism for the incorporation of clients' views in the decision-making process, but decision-making authority remains with organizational officials, in this case the principal and staff. Participation, on the other hand, includes the formal sharing of decision-making authority between the clients and organization officials, in this case parents and the principal and staff.

A number of theorists have developed hierarchical models of involvement based upon a similar distinction (Arnstein, 1969; Kaplan and Tune, 1978; Licata, 1982).

The findings of the study indicate that most parents perceived their role opportunities to be limited to the lower levels of the respective hierarchies. Figure 7.0 indicates that, according to Arnstein (1969), parents' current role opportunities are limited to levels one to five, indicative of non-participation or token participation in Arnstein's (1969) terms.

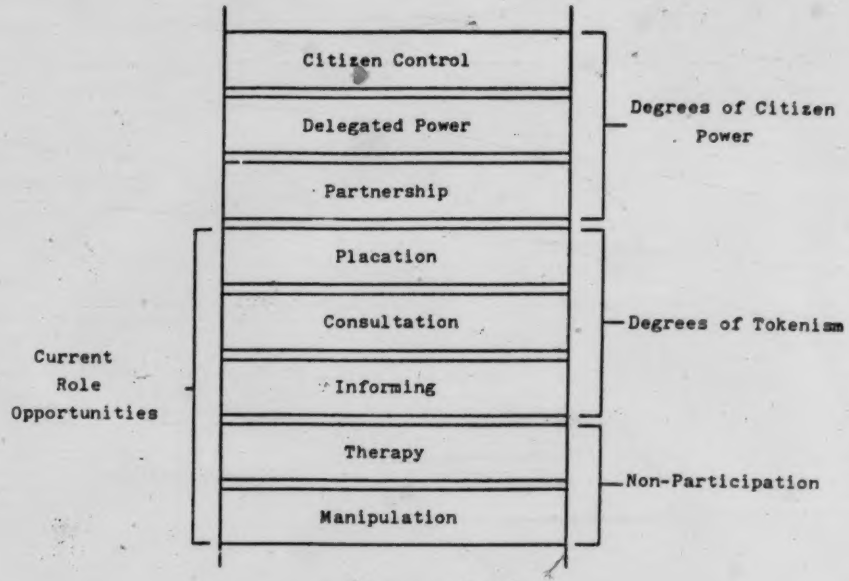
Citizen Control
Delegated Power
Partnership
Placation
Consultation
Informing
Therapy
Manipulation
Degrees of Citizen Power
Degrees of Tokenism
Non-Participation
Current Role Opportunities

Figure 7.0.

A Ladder of Participation Showing Current Parent Role Opportunities (Adapted from Arnstein, 1969:216-224).

In the Kaplan and Tune (1978) model most parents would currently be limited to levels one and two. Figure 7.1 indicates that, according to Kaplan and Tune (1978), parents' current role opportunities are limited to support and advisory activities.

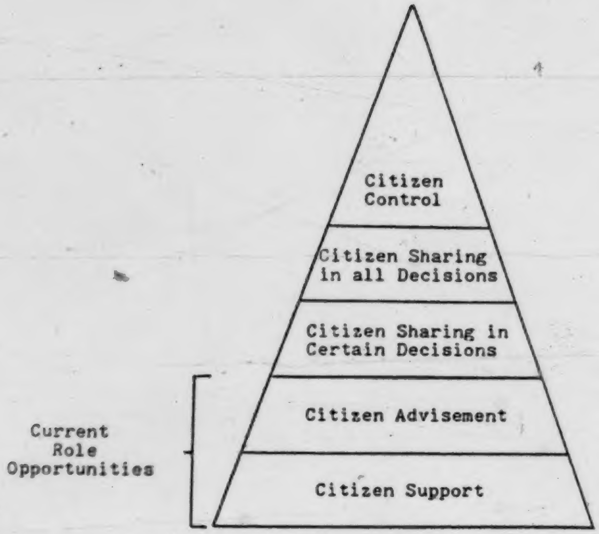
Citizen Control
Citizen Sharing in all Decisions
Citizen Sharing in Certain Decisions
Citizen Advisement
Citizen Support
Current Role Opportunities

Figure 7.1.

Levels of Citizen Involvement Showing Current Parent Role Opportunities (Adapted from Kaplan and Tune, 1978:15).

Parents perceived their current role in the school to be largely service and support oriented and peripheral to the main task of the school. Parents have no decision-making function and the extent of their influence is largely at the pleasure of the school principal.

Attitudes Toward Parent Participation

The findings of the study indicate that any reform of local school administrative structures that include a more authoritative role for parents should not proceed solely on the basis of an assumed general parent desire for such a role.

The findings of previous surveys (Canadian Education Association, 1979; Gallup, 1981) and research

(Williams, 1978; Musgrave, 1978; Thornbury, 1976) have suggested that while a significant proportion of parents are desirous of a more influential role, the majority of parents do not seek such a role. The findings of this study indicated that parents were almost equally divided in their attitudes toward the participation of parents in school decision-making. While approximately half the parent respondents were dissatisfied with their current opportunities to participate, an equal proportion saw the assumption of a more authoritative role as unnecessary, or undesirable.

In fact, parents as a whole expressed considerable reluctance about the adoption of a shared decision-making role with professional educators. Even supporters of the concept, while perceiving themselves as likely to be successful in the role, expressed reservations about the concept in practice and doubts about the capacity and readiness of parents in general to perform such a role.

That is not to suggest that parents reported an ideal relationship with professional educators. Parents perceived that their opinion was seldom sought concerning matters they defined as important to their children's education, they felt effectively excluded from such key decision-making areas as curriculum and instruction, even on an advisory basis, and they felt that most of the initiative for parent-school communication emanated from parents. In fact, most parents sought a more influential, if not authoritative, role. Many sought a shared decision-making role. Other parents would value the opportunity to contribute to decisions they saw as important on a regular and systematic basis, with more of the initiative in the communication of parent opinion being taken by the school principal and staff.

Recent public surveys of attitudes toward lay participation have reported findings that suggest considerable lay reluctance to serve on school advisory committees, Home and School Associations or Parent-Teacher Associations (Canadian Education Association, 1979; Gallup, 1981). In this study it was found that parents were almost unanimous in their expressed willingness to serve in a shared decision-making capacity if such a structure were adopted. Parents in this study were asked about their willingness to serve on a body that had an important decision-making, as distinct from an advisory, role in the school. It may be that parents' willingness to become involved is related to the nature of the role offered.

Common reference is made in the literature to professional educators' opposition or ambivalence towards the assumption of a more authoritative role for parents in the school (Gittell, 1977; Lightfoot, 1978; Brown, 1981). In general, that opinion was confirmed by the findings of this study. A substantial proportion of the professional educator respondents expressed their opposition to the concept of sharing decision-making authority with parents. More than two-thirds felt that shared decision-making was unnecessary or undesirable. In reference to particular decision areas, however, there was some variation in the attitude of principals and teachers towards what was an appropriate role for parents.

Parent Participation and the Saliency of Decisions

The findings of the study indicate that decision areas differ in their salience for professional educators and for parents. Figure 7.2 illustrates the saliency of particular decision areas for professional educators. Principals and teachers distinguished between professional and non-professional decision areas. Professional decisions were those perceived as intimately related to the performance of the professional role. Professional decisions usually included the general area of curriculum and instruction, and sometimes the definition was expanded to include almost all key areas of school decision-making. In such decision areas as teaching methodology, the organization and structure of learning experiences, and the control and management of the class, even an advisory role for parents was strongly opposed. In contrast, many professional educators supported an advisory or participant role for parents in such decisions as the selection of school personnel, school financial planning and other decisions defined as peripheral to the professional task. These findings are consistent with other research findings.

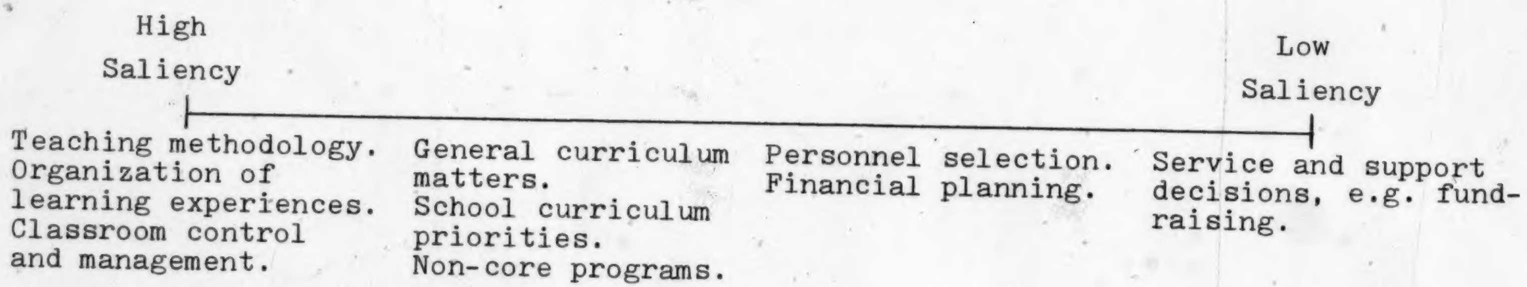
High
Saliency
Low
Saliency
Teaching methodology.
Organization of learning experiences.
Classroom control and management.
General curriculum matters.
School curriculum priorities.
Non-core programs.
Personnel selection.
Financial planning.
Service and support decisions, e.g. fund-raising.

Figure 7.2.

Continuum of Decision Area Saliency: Professional Educators

(Harriet and Ornstein, 1976; Mohrman et al., 1978; Grassie, 1979) which indicated that professional educators placed a higher value on their own participation in decisions most closely associated with their professional role and differed in their attitude towards parent participation depending on the decision area concerned.

Most parents made no such distinction between professional and non-professional decision areas. Rather, issues were considered salient if they were defined as intimately related to the educational or personal well-being of their own children. Using that criterion, parents indicated high interest in a more influential role in decisions which related to the educational program and associated matters. Figure 7.3 illustrates the saliency of particular decision areas for parents. Theorists have commonly referred to the relationship between propensity to participate and the nature of the decision (Simon, 1977; Miner, 1978; Wickstrom, 1979) and that relationship was also evident in this study. While conventional wisdom and some research evidence (Tucker and Zeigler, 1980) have indicated that the educational program and related issues have a low saliency for most parents, the findings of this study indicated substantial parent interest in the general area of curriculum and instruction, and that parents would value a more influential role in that decision area in their children's school. The findings of this study support the conviction of Steinberg (1977:43) who commented:

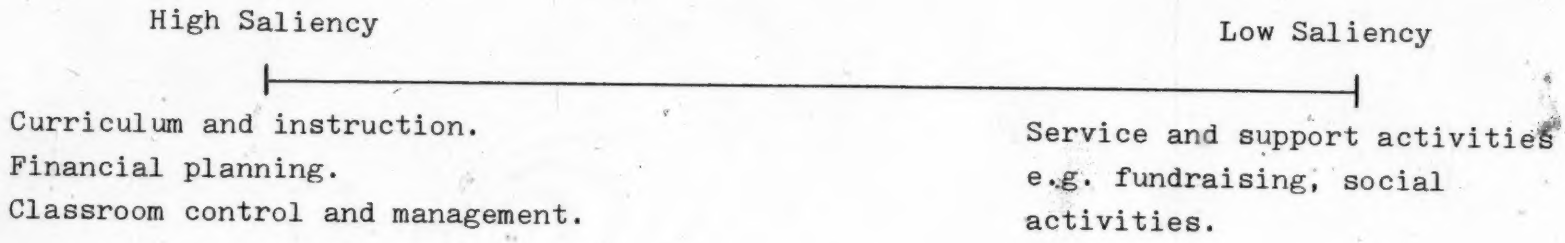
High Saliency
Low Saliency
Curriculum and instruction.
Financial planning.
Classroom control and management.
Service and support activities
e.g. fundraising, social
activities.

Figure 7.3.

Continuum of Decision Area Saliency: Parents

> Non-involvement [of parents] in issues related to the school program could be the logical response to a situation where educators have defined much lay participation as illegitimate.

On the other hand, most parents, while prepared to undertake the service and support role requested by professional educators in the belief that this would have positive outcomes for their children's educational experiences, placed a lower importance on their participation in those areas.

It is likely, then, that attitudes toward parent participation in the school will vary depending upon the particular decision area involved. In addition, the saliency of one decision area may be such that opposition to the concept as a whole may result. While professional educators were often supportive of parent participation in some decision areas, the saliency of the area of curriculum and instruction was such that a large majority indicated opposition to the concept of shared decision-making itself.

The potential for conflict between the two groups is likely to be greatest when participation is sought, or granted to parents, in areas of high professional educator saliency, and least if the decision area has a low saliency for one or both of the two groups. Table 7.0 is a summary of the relative saliency of particular decision areas for parents and professional educators, and indicates decision areas in which the potential for conflict in a shared decision-making context would be highest. According to the findings of this study the potential for conflict

Table 7.0

Parent Participation and the Potential for Conflict.

	Parents. Saliency			Prof. Educators. Saliency			Potential for Conflict		
	Low	Med	High	Low	Med	High	Unlikely	Possible	Likely
General curriculum matters, school curriculum priorities, non-core programs.			*		*			*	
Teaching methodology, organization and structure of learning experiences.			*			*			*
Classroom control and management.			*			*			*
Personnel selection.			*		*			*	
Financial planning.		*			*		*		
Service and support activities e.g. fund-raising, social activities.	*			*			*		

would be highest if parents were to achieve participant status in policy development related to details of the school program, to teaching methodology, or to classroom control and management.

Propensity to Participate and Related Factors

Parents and professional educators reported a range of factors which were related to their attitudes toward parent participation and parents' propensity to participate. While important differences have been reported, the substantial similarity in parent and professional educator perceptions suggest the existence of certain factors that may be basic to attitudes toward participation and propensity to participate.

Participation and a zone of satisfaction.

Boyd (1976), following Simon (1957), Barnard (1960) and Bridges (1967), suggested the existence of a zone of tolerance as "that area of manoeuverability granted, or yielded, to the leadership of schools by a community." With an important difference in emphasis, the findings of this study support the validity of that concept in the context of parents' attitudes toward participation and their propensity to participate. Rather than a zone of tolerance, which has a negative connotation, the more positive concept of a zone of satisfaction would be more accurate in relation to the findings of this study. Parent satisfaction was related in a fundamental way to parents' attitudes toward their existing role in the school and to their felt need or desire to participate in the administration of the school. General satisfaction with the school, as indicated by parents' evaluation of the progress of their own children in school, by their assessment of the competence of the school principal and staff, and by their confidence in the receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel to their particular needs and concerns was clearly related to a diminished felt need and desire to participate.

Parents, implicitly or explicitly, defined parameters within which their general satisfaction was achieved. Professional educators also perceived the existence of certain parent-imposed parameters which were related to parents' satisfaction with the school and which guided the principal and staff in their administration of the school. While general satisfaction was maintained most parents, including supporters of a shared decision-making role for parents, felt less need to participate. Similarly, professional educators felt that while they observed the limits imposed by parents, little parent demand to participate would be likely. Parents did recognize, however, that the bases for their satisfaction were subjective and indicated that, if changing circumstances resulted in a decline in satisfaction, their desire and need to participate was likely to increase. Further, because parents based their level of satisfaction on subjective assessment, it is likely that their individual parameters of satisfaction will vary and be subject to change.

The opportunity to participate. Theorists (Mischler, 1979; Bachrach, 1967) have suggested the importance of the opportunity to participate in the development of positive attitudes toward participation in general. The findings of this study support the existence of such a relationship. Parents and professional educators referred to their perceived lack of opportunity to participate in the school as being related to their attitudes toward the concept. There is no recent tradition of parent participation in local school decision-making in the Edmonton Public School district. Common reference was made by parents to their lack of experience and familiarity with the concept and to the affect that had on their capacity to conceptualize shared decision-making in practice and on their attitude towards the concept itself. Much of the reluctance about shared decision-making in schools may be related to parents' lack of experience with that structure in practice.

Professional educators also referred to what they defined as limited opportunities to participate in key decisions related to the operation of the school. Principals and teachers defined provincial and district curriculum guidelines as a significant constraint on their professional autonomy, and teachers felt that, in general, the concept of shared decision-making was not well established in their schools. A more positive attitude towards the concept could depend on the more general assumption of a shared decision-making role between professional educators at the local school level.

Similarly, Almond and Powell (1978) and Van Loon and Whittington (1981) have referred to the need for available and appropriate structures that facilitate participation. The findings of the study indicate a relationship between available structures, attitudes toward participation and the propensity of parents to participate. Highly involved parents were consistently less satisfied with their current role in the school, more supportive of the concept of shared decision-making, and more desirous of participating in that capacity. These parents reported that the existence of a formal structure provided a mechanism for their active involvement or, as one parent commented, advisory council membership "shows parents how to become involved." The existence of a structure, and their membership on that body, gave these parents access to more information about the school, made them more familiar with the way the school operates, and resulted in their ability and willingness to proffer opinions related to the operation of the school and a desire to participate in the actual decision-making.

The definition of role. A role is "the behavior that is generally expected of one who occupies a particular position or status" (Ritzer, 1979:579). Goode (1977:47) adds that to be more precise, the term role relationship is more appropriate:

> . . . since the norms, obligations, or behavior of any one social position refer to relationships with one or more persons in other complementary positions.

According to Hagedorn (1980:89-90), a status is a culturally defined position or a set of beliefs about a social position. A status specifies how people are supposed to respond towards one another and the appropriate behavior in particular situations. Further, statuses are highly interrelated in the sense that their rights and obligations are defined in terms of one another. It is evident, then, that the status and roles of parents and professional educators are important in the nature of the relationship between them.

The way in which parents and professional educators defined their respective roles in the school was related to their attitudes toward parent participation and to parents' propensity to participate. Professional educators defined a role which had implications for their attitudes toward parent participation and for the role which was deemed to be appropriate for parents in the school. By claiming responsibility for the basic philosophy and direction of the school by virtue of the special training and expertise that qualified them for that role, professional educators also claimed the decision-making autonomy necessary to fulfill that function. Accordingly, parents were effectively excluded from all but a peripheral role in the operation of the school. By implication, the role of parents was defined as one of service and support for the school. While an advisory role for parents was thought appropriate in some decision areas, this was usually in the context of professional decision-making authority. It is evident that in these circumstances widespread professional educator support for a concept that was based on an enhanced role for parents, and was likely to challenge the traditional parent-professional educator relationship, would be improbable.

Parents also conceptualized an ideal relationship with professional educators which had implications for their attitudes toward participation and their propensity to participate. Parents generally placed high value on education and respected the need for, and validity of, professional training and expertise in the performance of the professional role. Parents also assumed a degree of professional decision-making authority was necessary if the school principal and staff were to function as effectively as possible. As a consequence, parents themselves imposed limits on the extent to which their participation in the operation of the school was appropriate and desirable. For some parents those limits were considerable. Thus parents' attitudes toward participation were in a sense predetermined by their conception of the ideal parent-professional educator relationship. So was their propensity to participate thereby constrained.

It is likely, then, that a basic precondition to widespread professional educator and parent support for the concept of shared decision-making in the school would be the redefinition of the roles of both groups in the school and wide acceptance of those revised roles. However, as Lenski and Lenski (1978:53) note, "redefining a role's requirements and expectations may be impossible or, at least, extremely difficult." In changing the norms attached to a role, a simultaneous modification occurs in the norms of a related role. Lenski and Lenski (1978:53) argue that every individual has a vested interest in minimizing the costs and maximizing the benefits of the roles he or she occupies. Any effort to redefine rights and responsibilities is likely to meet resistance.

The influence of the professional educator. The findings of the study indicate that the school principal and staff bear a heavy responsibility for the attitudes of parents toward participation and for their propensity to participate if given that opportunity. This relationship has been referred to by other theorists and researchers (Featherstone, 1976; Cohen, 1978; Musgrave, 1978; Davies, 1981) and its importance has been emphasized in the context of this study.

It was clear that many parents are uncomfortable in the school environment and feel a certain lack of confidence in their relationship with professional educators.

Some professional educators referred to the continued existence of a psychological professional-lay communication barrier which they perceived still acted to constrain parents in their dealings with the school. Cohen (1978) suggests that parents' deference towards professional educators determines the nature of parent-professional educator relationships. Parent deference was not evident in this study. Principals and teachers were generally held in high repute and their opinions valued, but the relationship was not based on deference. Rather, a widespread lack of confidence on the part of parents and a strong belief in the propriety of the existing parent-professional educator relationship influenced the nature of parent-professional educator relations.

Principals and teachers communicate their attitudes toward parents in the school by the way they speak and act. Parents, often already hesitant about being in the school, are very sensitive to the signals they receive and are likely to be encouraged or dissuaded from involvement and participation as a consequence. The importance of the principal and staff has been highlighted in regard to a variety of matters related to the successful operation of the school. It is clear that they are also intimately involved in the way that parents feel about their children's school and their propensity to become more actively involved or participate in its operation.

The nature of the role. A commonly recurring theme in the literature is the notion that many parents are deterred from more active involvement in the school by the nature of their current role opportunities (Taylor, 1976; Davies, 1981; Fernandez, 1980).

In the context of this study, parents and professional educators were in agreement concerning the service and support bias of the current role of parents in the school. Parents have no formal decision-making function; they are effectively excluded from key areas of school decision-making and they report that most role opportunities are related to the service and support of the school and peripheral to the educational experiences of their children.

The findings of the study suggest that for a significant proportion of parents, the limited role opportunities currently available was an important deterrent to greater involvement in the school. These parents also saw the nature of the role as an important deterrent to other parents currently not involved in the school.

While not all parents reported being deterred by their current role opportunities, and most parents indicated a willingness to undertake service and support activities in the hope that their children would benefit from those endeavors, it is likely that many parents would more willingly devote scarce resources such as time and energy if they were offered what was perceived to be a more meaningful role and if they became convinced that they could be genuine participants in the operation of the school.

THE DECISION TO PARTICIPATE: SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This was a descriptive study in which an inductive approach was adopted with the objective of developing some tentative theoretical propositions related to parents' propensity to participate in the operation of their local school. Based on the findings of the study and the review of the literature presented in chapter 2, some tentative theoretical propositions related to parents' propensity to participate will be presented in this section of the chapter.

The Concept of Participation

Participation can be conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon. Parents vary in their desire to participate, in the mode of involvement or participation preferred and in the intensity or level of activity with which that involvement or participation is pursued. These dimensions of participation can be conceptualized as continua as illustrated in Figure 7.4. Participation has a dynamic character and an individual's position on each of the dimensions is likely to vary over time, and as circumstances or situations change.

The interactive influence of a range of factors influences a parent's position on the continua at any point in time. A parent's position on the continua will largely determine the nature of that parent's relationship with the school.

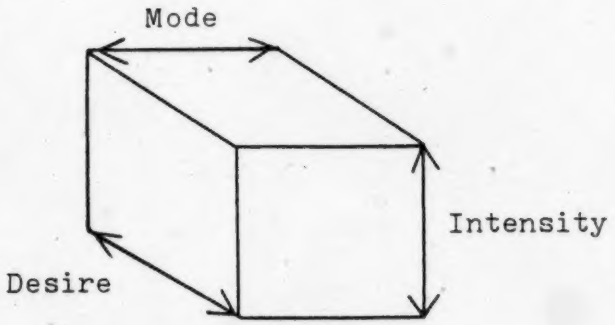

Figure 7.4.

Dimensions of Participation.

School-Parent Relations: A Typology

Parents differ in the nature of their relationship with school personnel and in the extent to which they need or desire to become involved or participate in the operation of their children's school. Table 7.1 indicates that, based on the findings of the study, four distinct types of parent-school relationships can be described.

Some parents are involved in the school on an infrequent basis, and only in response to matters they define as having a special relevance for the educational and personal well-being of their own children. These parents generally experience high levels of satisfaction with the school and feel considerable confidence in the school principal and staff and the profession as a whole.

Table 7.1

Parent-School Relationships. A Typology.

		Confidence in Princ/Staff	Confidence in Profession	Satisfaction with School	Nature of Relationship
Not Involved		Low	Low	Low	Not involved.
		High	High	High	Not involved or sporadic.
Involved	Supportive	High	High	High	Highly involved in a service and support role.
	Potential Participant	Less Confident	Less Confident	Less Satisfied	Likely to pursue a more authoritative role.

Largely because of their high satisfaction and confidence, these parents feel little need or desire to participate in the operation of the school and even their involvement is likely to be limited to special activities or attendance at selected school social or ceremonial events. These parents, however, represent an important source of potential energy which can be mobilized in the event that a matter of particular urgency or seriousness arises.

Other parents are more regularly and intimately involved with the operation of the school. These parents consist of two groups, the nature of which closely parallel the findings of Salisbury (1980). The first group are also highly satisfied with the school and express high confidence in the school principal and staff. These are the strong and loyal supporters of the school. They express little need or desire to participate in the operation of the school, preferring to leave the decision-making to the professional educators. These parents willingly, and consistently, assume the service and support role traditionally offered to parents. Their high level of involvement is predicated on a strong belief that their involvement is likely to have positive educational and personal outcomes for their own children. The involvement of these parents is largely supportive in orientation. While they may value the opportunity to contribute to school decisions, they are unlikely to actively pursue a decision-making role because of their current high level of satisfaction with the school. It was parents in this group, however, that sometimes expressed satisfaction with their existing role while being supportive of an enhanced role for parents in the school.

A smaller proportion of parents translate their high interest in their children's education into a more active role in the school. These parents are likely to pursue a more authoritative role. They are usually less satisfied with the performance of the school, the school principal and staff and less confident in the profession as a whole. These parents often have a clear and definite view of what an appropriate education for their children consists of and are willing to seek to influence school personnel concerning their objectives. They were often stimulated to seek participant status in the school by a particular issue defined to have profound consequences for the educational or personal well-being of their own children. Once stimulated, involvement and attempts to participate are likely to be continuous during the period of their children's attendance at the school.

The parent respondents in this study all indicated a strong belief in the value and importance of a high quality education for their children's future well-being and an interest in supporting their children in the pursuit of that objective. All the parent respondents occupied a relatively comfortable position in the community in terms of their access to social and economic resources and probably had positive and successful school experiences themselves. A substantial proportion of parents occupy a quite different position in terms of their access to social and economic resources and their own school experiences.

It is likely that these parents have a relationship with school personnel that differs from those already described. These parents, based on their own experiences, may have a different attitude concerning the value and importance of education. They are likely to be less confident in the profession as a whole and to feel less satisfied with the extent to which the school is meeting the needs of their children. Rather than pursue a more authoritative role in the school in an attempt to reverse that situation, these parents are likely to tolerate the situation. Their involvement in the school is likely to be rare and attempts to influence school decision-makers to be limited to times of exasperation. Negative attitudes toward education and the school are likely to be confirmed in the process.

Propensity to Participate

Parents are influenced in their decisions to seek to participate, or not participate, by a range of factors. These factors operate on individual parents in complex and interactive ways. The influence of a particular factor is likely to vary between parents as a whole, and their influence on individual parents is likely to have a dynamic quality and to vary according to time, circumstances, and context.

Parents determine the relative influence of particular factors by making subjective, personal judgments related to their children's educational and personal well-being, to their children's school and to the competence and suitability of the school principal and staff, and to the extent of their personal capacity and willingness to become involved or participate. These constitute the factors that are related to a parent's propensity to participate.

Judgments are likely to be made concerning all, or some, of the following:

1. The relationship between a parent's involvement or participation and the educational or personal well-being of their children.

2. The extent to which such personal attributes as a parent's confidence to act, level of interest or personal commitments encourage or dissuade involvement or participation.

3. The extent to which the attitudes or suitability and competence of the school principal and staff and the parent's confidence in the profession as a whole encourages or dissuades involvement or participation.

4. The level of satisfaction with the school, usually, as indicated by the general progress and welfare of their own children.

5. The manner in which the role of parents and the

role of professional educators have been defined.

6. The saliency of the decision areas involved.

7. The level of satisfaction with the parent's existing role opportunities in the school, based largely on the perceived accessibility, receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel to particular parent needs and concerns.

The Zone of Satisfaction

An individual zone of satisfaction is that area of latitude granted to professional educators by individual parents in the administration of a school. While the existence of basic community values and beliefs is likely to ensure substantial commonality in the nature of individual zones of satisfaction there will also be important differences in emphasis. The zone of satisfaction may be conceptualized as consisting of parameters defined explicitly or implicitly by individual parents.

In making judgments concerning the factors referred to above, parents adopt certain criteria which, together, constitute the parameters of an individual zone of satisfaction. These parameters act to guide the nature of a parent's desired relationship with the school. The zone of satisfaction has a dynamic quality and its scope and clarity is subject to change over time as circumstances and situations change. Variation in the zone of satisfaction is likely to occur as a consequence of changes in the individual parent or in the school situation.

Individual attitudes, values, hopes, and needs change over time. Changes in societal norms, an individual's exposure to more education, social and economic change or particular personal experiences are all likely to result in changes in the individual and consequent changes in the nature and scope of their zone of satisfaction. For example, worsening economic conditions could result in the adoption by a parent of new educational priorities for his or her children and a greater desire to influence school curriculum priorities, or exposure to a new approach to school organization could lead to a decline in a parent's satisfaction with the existing arrangements and a greater desire to promote its adoption in their own children's school.

Changes in the school situation are also likely to precipitate a change in a parent's zone of satisfaction. The appointment of a new principal judged to be incompatible with the community, the adoption of a radical approach to the teaching of reading, or the introduction of a regressive code of discipline might all affect a parent's zone of satisfaction and, thereby, affect that individual's propensity to participate. On the other hand, a parent's propensity to participate may decline as their confidence in the principal and staff increases or as the progress of their children becomes clearer.

A parent's felt need and desire to participate is likely to be related to the degree of correspondence between the nature of the administrative and educational decision-making of the school principal and staff and the criteria for satisfaction adopted by that parent. While school personnel confine their decisions to the parameters of a parent's zone of satisfaction, that parent is likely to be satisfied by the school and their felt need to participate is likely to be diminished as a consequence. The findings of this study indicate that relationship applies just as clearly in the case of parents who are strong advocates of an enhanced role for parents in the operation of their children's school. Because an individual parent's zone of satisfaction is subject to variation as a consequence of either school action or a change in a parent's opinion, the maintenance of satisfaction becomes a complex and demanding process for a school principal and staff.

The Zone of Satisfaction and Propensity to Participate

The type of relationship a parent has with school personnel, and a parent's propensity to participate, are related to the nature of that parent's zone of satisfaction. Table 7.2 summarizes that relationship.

A broadly defined zone of satisfaction. Some parents will have a zone of satisfaction that can be conceptualized as broadly-defined. These parents are likely to have few definite ideas concerning the nature and direction of their children's education and to rely on professional educators in that regard. Because of the

Table 7.2

The Zone of Satisfaction and Parent-School Relationships.

Individual Zone of Satisfaction	Level of Satisfaction	Propensity for Involvement	Nature of Relationship
Broadly-defined	High	Low	Not involved or sporadic.
	High	High	Highly involved in a service and support role.
Narrowly-defined	High	Low	Not involved or sporadic.
	High	High	Highly involved in a service and support role.
	Low	Low	Not involved or sporadic. May desire to participate, but desist.
	Low	High	Potential participants. Likely to pursue participant status.

broad definition of their zone of satisfaction these parents are likely to experience high levels of satisfaction with the school and, as a consequence, to feel little need or desire to participate in the operation of the school, preferring to leave school decision-making to the principal and staff. Based on differences in criteria adopted in judgments made concerning such matters as the likely benefits to their children from their involvement, the definition of the role of parents and professional educators in the school, the suitability of the available role opportunities, and their personal level of interest and time available, these parents comprise two groups.

One group of parents will feel a low desire or need to become involved or participate in the school because of their high level of satisfaction with the school and confidence in the principal and staff, and their relationship with the school will be one of detached clients. Involvement in the school will be non-existent or sporadic and attempts to participate will only be in response to the emergence of particular issues defined as crucial to the educational or personal well-being of their children.

Other parents with a broadly-defined zone of satisfaction will become highly involved in the activities of the school, but in an ultra-supportive capacity. For these parents the large-scale commitment of time and energy to the school is justified because of a strong belief that sufficient benefits will accrue to their children as a consequence. Because of their high level of satisfaction with the school, these parents are unlikely to seek a more authoritative role in the school. The nature of their involvement is likely to be service and support oriented.

A narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction. Other parents have clearer, more precisely defined ideas and objectives concerning the type of education most appropriate for their children and could be said to have a more narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction. These parents comprise four categories.

Some parents with a narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction will experience high levels of satisfaction with the school due to the correspondence between their expectations and the manner in which the school is operated and administered. These parents generally do not seek participant status in the school and are content to leave decision-making authority with the school principal and staff. Depending on the criteria adopted in making judgments about the school, their children's education and their individual situation, parents will choose not to become involved in the school on a regular basis or to become highly involved. Because of their high level of satisfaction with the school the involvement of parents who choose to become active is likely to be highly supportive in orientation and confined to activities with a service and support orientation. Other parents, also with a more narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction, may be less satisfied with the school and the performance of its principal and staff due to the mismatch between the parent's expectations and the way in which the school is operated and administered. Again, depending upon personal judgments made in connection with their children's education, the school and their own situation, and, in some cases, possibly influenced by their own experiences at school, these parents will either desist from any school involvement, except in extreme circumstances, or strive to achieve a more authoritative role in the school. The latter group are the potential participants in a school community. Their propensity to participate is high and they are likely to pursue a more authoritative role in the school.

Parents with a more narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction constitute a potentially volatile group in the school community. Their more narrowly-defined zone of satisfaction is more easily transgressed by school personnel and, therefore, their level of satisfaction with the school may be subject to more frequent and rapid change and the likelihood of their dissatisfaction greater. It is this group who are likely to be the most active in the pursuit of an enhanced role for parents in the operation of their children's school.

The Opportunity to Participate

Having made a decision to seek to participate in the operation of their children's school, the availability of appropriate structures and procedures in the school is likely to provide a further impetus to an individual's propensity to participate, making on-going participation more likely.

Conversely, the absence of clearly defined structures or procedures is likely to constrain parents in their propensity to participate. While it is possible to generate sufficient momentum to force the right to participate in specific issues, on-going participation is less likely to occur in the absence of legitimate, even legally-mandated, participatory structures and procedures.

The Decision to Participate

A parent's decision to seek to participate, or not participate, can be conceptualized as the final point in a chain of personal judgments related in a fundamental way to the educational and personal well-being of their own children. The process as conceptualized is presented in diagramatic form in Figure 7.5. Judgments are made by individual parents concerning (1) the relationship between a parent's involvement or participation and positive outcomes for their children, (2) the attitudes of professional educators toward parents in the school, (3) the extent of the parent's satisfaction with the school, (4) the manner in which the roles of professional educators and parents have been defined, (5) the saliency of the decision area concerned, (6) the perceived suitability of existing role opportunities for parents in the school, and (7) the

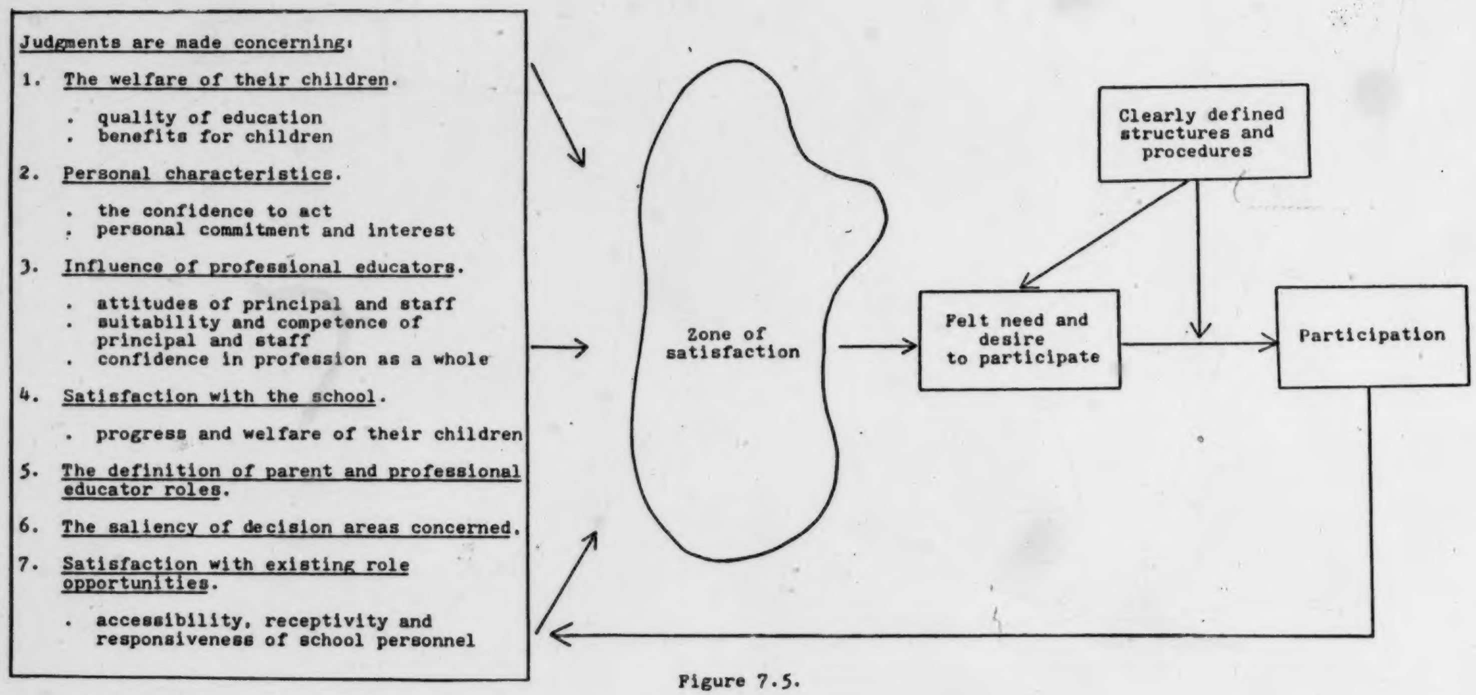
Judgments are made concerning:
1. The welfare of their children.
. quality of education
. benefits for children
2. Personal characteristics.
. the confidence to act
. personal commitment and interest
3. Influence of professional educators.
. attitudes of principal and staff
. suitability and competence of principal and staff
. confidence in profession as a whole
4. Satisfaction with the school.
. progress and welfare of their children
5. The definition of parent and professional educator roles.
6. The saliency of decision areas concerned.
7. Satisfaction with existing role opportunities.
. accessibility, receptivity and responsiveness of school personnel
Zone of satisfaction
Felt need and desire to participate
Clearly defined structures and procedures
Participation

Figure 7.5.

The Decision to Participate.

influence of such personal factors as individual confidence, interest and time and family commitments.

The criteria adopted in coming to these judgments form the basis for the development of an individual zone of satisfaction, the nature of which guides parents in their relationship with the school. An individual zone of satisfaction is that area of latitude granted by a parent to the school principal or staff in the operation and administration of the school. Individual zones of satisfaction vary in scope and clarity of definition and are likely to vary over time as circumstances and contexts change.

In general, a composite judgment of general satisfaction with the school results in a diminished felt need and desire to participate in its operation. Conversely, parents who feel substantially less than satisfied are likely to feel an increased need and desire to participate.

The decision to seek participant status will be reinforced and further stimulated by the existence and availability of appropriate structures and procedures to facilitate that participation. The absence of such a structure or procedure will seriously limit the opportunities for participation, and individual propensity to participate is likely to diminish over time in these circumstances.

Some Theoretical Propositions

- Parents differ in their propensity to participate. However, propensity to participate has a dynamic quality and is likely to vary over time and as circumstances and contexts change.

- The fundamental motivation for parents' involvement or participation in their children's school is a concern for the educational and personal welfare of their own children.

- Parents who are generally satisfied with their children's progress at school, who judge the school principal and staff to be competent and suitable, and who have confidence in the profession as a whole are likely to feel a diminished need and desire to participate in the operation of their children's school.

- The way in which parents and professional educators define their respective roles in the school constitutes a significant influence upon their attitudes toward parent participation in the school. Any major change in these attitudes would depend largely upon a redefinition of the respective roles.

- The saliency of decision areas and particular issues varies for parents and for professional educators. Decision areas and issues which have the highest saliency are also likely to be the ones in which participation is most highly valued and the sharing of decision-making authority most opposed.

. The school principal and staff bear a major responsibility for the extent to which parents may seek, or are willing, to become actively involved or participate in the operation of their children's school.

. The existence of legitimate and appropriate structures and procedures will encourage participation while their absence is likely to inhibit individual propensity to participate.

In summary, then, based on the findings of the study and the review of the literature, the conceptual model developed in this chapter differs from the original model developed in chapter two in several ways.

1. The typology of parent-school relationships presented in chapter two has been further developed to take account of the influence of a parent's confidence in the school principal and staff and the profession itself, and the important influence of a parent's overall satisfaction with the school in that parent's propensity to participate and the likely nature of their relationship with the school.

2. The findings of the study indicate that the original concept of an individual zone of tolerance would be more appropriately conceptualized as an individual zone of satisfaction.

3. Also in accordance with the findings of the study the importance of the concept of an individual zone of satisfaction in an individual's decision to participate has been emphasized.

4. The model of the decision to participate has been amended and further developed in accordance with the findings of the study. An individual's zone of satisfaction was found to be based upon the nature of individual judgments made by parents related to the welfare of their children, their evaluation of their children's school and its professional staff and several personal attributes. Individual propensity to participate, and the nature of a parent's relationship with the school, was found to be related to a parent's zone of satisfaction, aided by the existence of appropriate structures for participation and involvement within the school itself.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter consists of four major sections: (1) overview of the study, (2) a summary of the major findings of the study, (3) conclusions, and (4) a discussion of the implications of the study for practice and future research.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to identify and describe the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and factors related to those attitudes and parents' propensity to participate.

The 44 respondents consisted of the principal and four teachers from each of four elementary schools in the Edmonton Public School district and six parents of children attending each of those schools.

This was a descriptive study. The study had a qualitative orientation in that the researcher sought to achieve as complete a description and understanding of the area of study as possible, and adopted an inductive approach by which the researcher sought to generate theory rather than test existing theory. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full prior to analysis. A content analysis procedure was used to analyze the data. The research problems of the study provided the basic structure for the analysis and the presentation of the findings. However, no a priori categories were adopted within that basic structure.

The question of the validity of the study was addressed and steps were taken to maximize the trustworthiness of the data and the credibility of the findings.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was achieved through research directed at four major research problems, several of which included related sub-problems. The problem statements were derived from the conceptual framework and the review of the literature. The major findings related to each of the research problems are summarized below.

Research Problem 1: The Nature of the Current Role

> What is the nature of the current role of parents in local school decision-making, and how is this role assessed by parents and professional educators?

The problem was stated in the form of four sub-problems.

> 1.1. Is parent opinion sought concerning important issues in the operation of the school?

Parents reported that they were not normally consulted by school personnel prior to decisions being made on issues that parents considered to be important.

According to parents, professional educators tended to adopt a reactive rather than a proactive approach to the incorporation of parent opinion in the decision-making process. Parents felt that in most instances, parents would be required to take the initiative in the communication of their views or concerns to the school principal or staff.

Most professional educators subscribed to that assessment. While principals were satisfied that parent opinion was regularly sought prior to important decisions being made, most teachers reported that parent opinion was not regularly sought. Some teachers felt that parent opinion was only sought if certain conditions applied and, then, only in decision areas professional educators regarded as less important. There was also common agreement that much of the communication of parent opinion was on the initiative of parents.

Parents and professional educators distinguished between active solicitation of parent opinion and professional educators' willingness to receive, listen and consider parent opinion on the initiative of the parent. Professional educators were perceived to be open and accessible to any parents wishing to initiate communication with them.

1.2. On which types of issues is parent opinion most, and least, likely to be sought by school personnel?

Parents identified decisional areas they defined as "professional," as "related to the curriculum," as "to do with the general organization of the school" as areas in which their opinion was unlikely to be sought or to be particularly welcome. Parents also reported that they were most commonly offered involvement in the traditional range of parent service and support activities, activities perceived to be far removed from the main areas of school decision-making. Parents reported they were most likely to be offered involvement, or sometimes participation, when the school principal and staff judged a particular issue to be intimately related to individual children, to threaten the way in which they sought to operate the school or as likely to become controversial without the opportunity for parent input.

Professional educators agreed that decisions could be categorized as more or less appropriate for parent involvement and participation, and that a professional-non-professional dichotomy was an appropriate way to conceptualize the distinction. Decisions broadly classified as professional were generally defined as less appropriate for parent involvement and participation in decision-making. Professional educators confirmed the primacy of the service and support component of the current role of parents in the school.

> 1.3. What means do parents currently have to communicate their views and opinions to school personnel and how do parents and professional educators assess these means?

Parents have access to various means of direct communication with school personnel. Parents at three of the schools also had access to indirect means of communication through parent-advisory structures and all of those parents recognized the availability of those channels. Parents strongly preferred direct means of communication and professional educators encouraged this approach. Both groups found the existing formal advisory structures ineffective as a vehicle for the communication of parent opinion and concern, although highly involved parents perceived those structures to be viable for raising certain types of issues and their existence to be a necessary requirement if parents were to have the potential of exerting systematic influence in the school policy-making process.

Parents and professional educators were satisfied that the existing means of communication satisfied the needs of most parents.

1.4. How do parents and professional educators assess the extent of parent influence in school decisions?

Most parents felt that, with certain qualifications, they could be successful in influencing school decision-makers if the need arose to do so. The underlying imperative of parent initiative was again evident in this context. Parents felt their potential influence was likely to be greater when the demands were located in non-professional decision areas, when acting as a coordinated, broadly-based group rather than as individuals, and if their demands were reasonable and presented in an ordered and rational way. Minimal influence was expected in decision areas defined as professional.

Professional educators were equivocal in their attitudes toward the extent of parent influence in school decisions. While parents were perceived, in theory and practice, to have considerable potential influence, that influence was likely to be qualified by the principal and staff's assessment of the strength and determination of the desire to participate, by whether influence was sought in a so-called professional decision area, and by the degree of correspondence between the demand and professional opinion.

Principals referred to the considerable influence exerted on them as a consequence of the countless informal contacts they had with parents when opinions and concerns were often expressed, sometimes in a way quite oblivious to the parents concerned. There was common agreement, too, that school personnel sought to accommodate what they defined as basic community values and beliefs in their administration of the school.

Research Problem 2: Satisfaction with the Current Role

> How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

The problem was stated in the form of three sub-problems.

> 2.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making in particular decision areas?

Strong parent support was indicated for the appropriateness and desirability of some form of parent involvement or participation in the three areas of school decision-making addressed. Principals and teachers were generally opposed to sharing decision-making authority with parents although there was substantial support for involvement in some areas in an advisory capacity.

A clear majority of parents indicated their support for the involvement, and often the participation, of parents in the general area of curriculum and instruction. Principals and teachers were almost unanimous in their opposition to any form of shared decision-making with parents in the area of curriculum and instruction. While the appropriateness of parent involvement in such matters as the identification of school program priorities or the nature of non-core curriculum programs was often endorsed, strong professional educator opposition was expressed to any form of involvement in matters relating to methodology, the selection and structuring of childrens' learning experiences or classroom management and control.

Most parents indicated a strong desire to participate in the selection of the school principal and a desire to, at least, be involved in the selection of school staff members. A substantial proportion of professional educators, including one-third of the respondents who supported a shared decision-making function, also supported a more influential role for parents in that decision area.

Almost all parents sought a more influential role, many in a shared decision-making capacity, in the development of the school's budget. Most principals and teachers supported the involvement, and in some cases the participation, of parents in that process.

In discussing parent participation in these decision areas principals, and especially teachers, drew attention to what they described as their own limited participation in the decision areas addressed.

2.2. To what extent have parents been denied the opportunity to participate in specific issues in which they would have sought participation?

Almost all parent respondents reported never having been denied the opportunity to participate in issues in which they would have sought participation. For some parents that fact was due to the singular absence of issues thought to be significant enough to warrant participation. For other parents it was a consequence of their determination to express their point of view whenever the need arose to do so, with or without professional educator approval.

2.3. How satisfied are parents and professional educators with the current level of parent participation in local school decision-making?

Slightly more than half the parent respondents reported general satisfaction with the current arrangements for the incorporation of parent opinion in the school decision-making process and slightly less than half expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction with their opportunities to participate. Parent satisfaction was almost always related to a parent's assessment of the performance of the school, to the academic progress and general well-being of their own children at school, and to the extent to which school personnel were perceived to be responsive to a parent's needs and concerns. Parents were cognizant of the subjective basis of their judgments and aware that their satisfaction with the existing arrangements could vary according to circumstances.

Some dissatisfied parents referred to what they perceived to be the denial of a regular opportunity to contribute to important decisions concerning the education of their children. Other parents referred to their belief in the right of parents to an influential role in decisions related to the education of their children. While dissatisfied parents sought a more influential role in the school, often on the basis of a shared decision-making function, it was clear that those parents did not seek to take over control of the school. Involvement and participation was sought mainly in the major policy decisions relating to the operation of the school. It was neither sought nor expected in the detail of the day-to-day operation of the school. For some dissatisfied parents, the opportunity to contribute to policy development in a regular and systematic way, and in the knowledge that theirs was a valued contribution, would suffice.

Principals and teachers expressed a high level of satisfaction with the existing level of parents' influence in the school. While the need and desirability of parent involvement was generally acknowledged, little need was seen to increase parent participation in school decision-making. Principals and teachers argued that, in fact, parents already exerted considerable influence, albeit in an informal way, and that school personnel sought to accommodate basic community values and beliefs in their administration of the school. Professional educators' satisfaction was predicated upon their perception of high levels of parent support for the school, upon their belief that parents had access to a variety of channels by which they could communicate with school personnel, and upon the conviction that parents felt free and welcome to contact the school principal or a teacher at any time the need arose to do so.

Research Problem 3: Attitudes Toward Participation and Related Factors

> What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making and what factors are related to those attitudes?

The problem was stated in the form of two sub-problems.

> 3.1. What are the attitudes of parents and professional educators toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making?

Parents were almost evenly divided in their attitude towards the concept of shared decision-making between professional educators and parents. While slightly more than half of the parent respondents reported general support for the concept, slightly less than half felt it to be inappropriate or unnecessary. Parents were reticent in their attitude towards shared decision-making. No parent offered unqualified support. All perceived certain dangers and necessary limits should the concept be adopted. Some parents referred to the role of traditional practice as a limiting factor in their ability to conceptualize shared decision-making in practice.

Most professional educators were clearly opposed to the concept of shared decision-making at the local school level. Two-thirds of the professional educator respondents saw it as inappropriate or unnecessary. Opposition was expressed by all four principals, a majority of teacher respondents in all four schools and by all professional educator respondents from the school where there was tension between school personnel and parents. However, a significant minority, one-third of the teacher respondents, indicated their support for the concept of sharing decision-making authority between parents and professional educators at the local school level.

> 3.2. What factors are related to parent and professional educator attitudes toward the participation of parents in local school decision-making?

Four factors were related to parents' attitudes toward their participation in local school decision-making.

More than half the parent respondents referred to the qualifications of parents to undertake a shared decision-making role in the school. Parents in general were perceived to lack interest in their children's education and the welfare of the school, to have an inappropriate knowledge base and background of experiences, and to be generally incapable of adopting the broad, whole-school approach to decision-making that would be necessary. Parent respondents themselves, especially highly involved parents, did not feel deficient in those qualities.

Parents perceived the existence of a right and proper relationship between themselves and professional educators which acted to limit the extent to which their participation in the school would be appropriate. While again emphasizing their need to be heard, parents saw limits to the extent to which they should properly participate in school decision-making and the need for a degree of professional decision-making autonomy. Parents distinguished between major policy decisions and fundamental change and the countless minor decisions in which they sought no part. Parents generally recognized professional expertise and training as legitimate and necessary and saw that as another reason to limit their participation.

Concern was also expressed that elected parent representatives would not be representative of parents as a whole. Almost half of the parent respondents referred to the danger of small group domination as a result of a lack of interest by most parents or the inability of elected parents to adequately represent their interests due to lack of knowledge and experience.

Some parents felt that shared decision-making status should be the final point in a developmental process to be achieved in carefully controlled, incremental stages. Implicit in this belief was the concept of community readiness. Parents assumed that most communities were at that time not well enough prepared to undertake a shared decision-making role successfully. An advisory role was seen as a necessary first step and over one-third of parent respondents, particularly highly involved parents, referred to the need for a formal parent-advisory structure in that context.

The way in which professional educators have defined their role in the school was related to their conception of the role of parents in the school and to their attitudes toward parent participation in the school. Professional educators were perceived to have responsibility for what does and does not happen in the school, to possess the qualifications to make those decisions and to require that degree of decision-making autonomy necessary to allow them to perform that task. The role of parents, then, was to support the decisions of school personnel and to serve the school in the performance of its task. The right of parents to advise was acknowledged but in the context of the professional educator as the final decision-maker.

Previous experiences with parents in the school were also related to professional educators' attitudes toward parent participation. There was a close correspondence between positive experiences and support of parent participation and negative experiences and opposition to the concept.

Principals and teachers were highly satisfied with the nature of the existing home-school relationship and that satisfaction was related to their attitude towards enlarging the role of parents in the school. Principals and teachers perceived high levels of parent satisfaction with the existing arrangements and, in concert with their own preference for an informal relationship with parents and the conviction that parents' needs were being well-satisfied, many saw little need for change.

Research Problem 4: Propensity to Participate and Related Factors

> What factors are related to the propensity of parents to participate in local school decision-making?

The problem was stated in the form of two sub-problems.

> 4.1. What factors influence parents in their decision to seek to participate, or not participate, in local school decision-making?

Fundamental to parents' propensity to become involved or seek to participate in the school was a belief in the value of education and a conviction that a parent's presence in the school was likely to have beneficial affects for the educational and personal well-being of their own children.

For parents classified as highly involved, and parents who considered themselves so, particular issues, defined by those parents as having special relevance for the educational or personal well-being of their own children, acted as the stimulus for initial involvement or attempts to participate.

Parents' propensity to participate was related in important ways to the way in which parents interpreted the attitudes of the principal and staff towards them. Parents were likely to be encouraged or dissuaded from greater involvement or attempts to participate on the basis of that interpretation. Parents were also influenced by their perception of the suitability and competence of the school principal and by their confidence in the profession as a whole. Positive assessments were related to a diminished felt need to participate while a negative judgment was likely to have the opposite affect.

Almost all parents referred to the relationship between their level of satisfaction with the school and their propensity to participate. Satisfaction, which was usually related to the good progress of their children at school, resulted in a diminished felt need and desire to participate, while dissatisfaction was likely to have the opposite affect.

Significant groups of parents were deterred from greater involvement and attempts to participate by such personal characteristics and perceptions as what were perceived as the limited role opportunities available to parents, by a certain lack of confidence in the school environment and in their relations with school personnel, and by constraints imposed by family and employment commitments and other priorities in life.

Experience on a school advisory body was also related to propensity to participate. Highly involved parents reported that their membership of such a body, and the access to greater information that resulted, stimulated their willingness to express opinions and their willingness and desire to participate in the final decision.

There were similarities and important differences in factors perceived by professional educators to be related to parents' propensity to participate. Professional educators agreed that involved parents placed a high value on education and that their involvement or attempts to participate were a reflection of a strong belief that such involvement or participation would have positive educational and personal outcomes for their children.

Professional educators recognized that principals and teachers themselves communicated attitudes toward parents in the school by the way in which they spoke and acted, and that the way in which parents interpreted those attitudes would be likely to encourage or dissuade them from greater involvement or attempts to participate in the school. Almost half of the professional educator respondents referred to the existence of a communication barrier, possibly based on a professional-lay distinction, which was likely to deter parents in their relations with the school. An equal number of professional educators rejected such a notion.

General satisfaction with the school was judged by most professional educators to diminish most parents' desire to participate. Professional educators perceived the existence of explicit or implicit, parent-imposed limits which acted to guide the principal and staff in the administration of the school and guide parents in their relations with the school. While these limits were respected, parents' desire to participate was perceived to be limited.

There was widespread agreement amongst professional educators that parents' family and employment commitments acted to limit the extent to which they were able or willing to devote more time to school affairs. Parents' lack of confidence in the school environment and in their relations with school personnel were also felt to deter some parents from greater involvement and attempts to participate. Most principals and teachers were satisfied that the nature of parents' current role in schools was not a deterrent to any more than a small minority of parents.

4.2. What type of issues do parents and professional educators report generate high parent desire to participate in local school decision-making?

Parents and professional educators reported that most parents attempted to participate in school decision-making infrequently and that the intensity of demands was likely to vary with the particular issue. Both groups reported that parents' desire to participate was likely to increase when issues arose that were judged to have important consequences for the well-being of their children, were perceived to threaten the basic direction and operation of the school or which were controversial in nature or became controversial as a result of exposure to public debate.

Emergent Themes

In the analysis of the data and the presentation of the findings of the study, a number of themes emerged which together may provide the basis for a clearer understanding of parent and professional educator attitudes toward the involvement and participation of parents in their children's school. The themes are summarized below.

The primacy of their own children's welfare. It was evident that for most parents the primary, and underlying, motivation for involvement and attempts to participate in their children's school was a belief that positive educational and personal benefits would accrue to their own children. While some parents undoubtedly saw benefits for the school population as a whole, this was not foremost in the minds of most parents.

The concept of general satisfaction. Parent satisfaction with the school was related in a fundamental way to parents' attitudes toward their current role in the school and the concept of parent participation in general, as well as to their own propensity to become more involved or seek to participate in the school. In coming to a judgment concerning their satisfaction with the school, parents evaluated the general progress of their own children at school, the suitability and professional competence of the school principal and staff and the extent to which school personnel were accessible, receptive and responsive to parents' individual needs and concerns. The assumption of general satisfaction within certain parameters adopted by parents generally resulted in a diminished felt need or desire to participate. However, satisfaction, and therefore propensity to participate, is likely to be dynamic in nature. Based largely on subjective assessment, satisfaction may vary as time, situation and circumstances change, resulting also in a variation in individual propensity to participate.

The desired role. Parents did not seek control of their local school, although many parents sought a more influential role in the school. While most parents did not resent the service and support components of their role, many felt excluded from key areas of school decision-making and sought, at least, the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process in those areas. A substantial proportion of parents sought a shared decision-making role with the principal and staff. However, these parents sought participation only in matters of importance related to the school and not in the day-to-day decision-making.

The importance of role definition. The way in which parents and professional educators defined their respective roles has important implications for their own relationship and for their attitude towards parent participation in the school.

Parents conceptualized an ideal relationship with professional educators which, while stressing their own need to be heard, imposed clear limits upon the extent to which their participation in the school was appropriate. Parents acknowledged the necessity and validity of professional training and expertise and the need for a degree of decision-making autonomy if the professional task was to be effectively completed. Professional educators assumed responsibility for the philosophy and approach of the school and for the host of decisions which resulted from that responsibility. Because of professional expertise and training, the principal and staff were perceived as the appropriate decision-makers, making their possession of the necessary decision-making authority essential. In accordance with that role definition professional educators emphasized the service and support component of the parents' role in school. While some advisory opportunities were not opposed, this was in the context of professional decision-making authority.

As a consequence of defined roles, parent reticence concerning shared decision-making may have been encouraged, while professional educator opposition to the concept may be a natural consequence of their own role definition.

The opportunity to participate. Parents and professional educators referred, or alluded, to the influence of current practice on their attitudes toward parent participation in the school. Both groups reported limited opportunity to participate in the school decision-making process. There is no recent tradition of parent participation in the administration of their children's school, except through the district-wide school board. The extent of parent involvement depends largely on the disposition of the school principal and staff. Some parents specifically referred to their difficulty in conceptualizing the concept of shared decision-making in practice. Other parents alluded to a similar difficulty. Principals and teachers also referred to their limited opportunities to participate in key areas of school decision-making.

It is likely that experience, and the extent of perceived opportunities to participate, will influence individual attitudes toward the concept of parent participation in the school.

The influence of professional educators. Parents and principals and teachers have emphasized the importance of professional educators in encouraging or dissuading parents from greater involvement and participation in the school. Many parents lack confidence in the school environment and in the company of a principal or teacher and are very sensitive to professional attitudes toward them in the school.

The school principal and staff already bear a heavy responsibility for other aspects related to the successful operation of the school and for the well-being of children in the school. It is likely that they also play a crucial role in a parent's decision to become involved or attempt to participate in the operation of the school.

Highly involved parents. It was evident that highly involved parents differed from the parent sample as a whole in important respects. These parents were consistently less satisfied with their current role in the school, more supportive of an authoritative role for parents in the key areas of decision-making addressed and more supportive of the concept of a shared decision-making function for parents in the school. For these parents, interest in their children's education was often translated into active involvement and attempts to participate by a particular issue. In general, that active involvement has been maintained. Having become actively involved, the existence of a formal advisory structure provided a mechanism for the further development of their involvement. Membership on that body gave parents access to more information about the operation of the school, made them more familiar with school problems and procedures and stimulated their willingness to proffer opinions related to the school. With opinions came the desire to participate in decision-making.

The existence of a formal mechanism, then, may stimulate parents' willingness and desire to participate in the operation of the school.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study and the discussion of those findings in relation to the literature.

1. The current role of parents in schools is perceived by parents and professional educators to be largely service and support oriented and peripheral to the important areas of decision-making in the school. Many parents feel underinformed about the operation of the school and effectively excluded from areas of decision-making they defined as important. Parents feel most parent-school communication is a result of their initiative.

2. Parents are generally satisfied with the existing means of communication with school personnel. Both groups prefer direct means of communication. Parent

satisfaction is based largely on high levels of confidence in the accessibility, receptivity and responsiveness of the school principal and staff. The absence of a formal structure was not a source of dissatisfaction. The formal advisory structures were judged to be ineffective by parents and professional educators due largely to the current imprecision in their role definition. Highly involved parents emphasized the need for a formal structure if parent opinion was to be communicated on a regular basis.

3. Parents felt confident they could influence school decision-makers if necessary, depending upon the nature of the issue and the manner in which the demand was presented. Most parents made infrequent attempts to do so. Professional educators reported that potential parent influence was dependent on the nature of the issue, the coincidence of the demand with professional opinion and the strength of the demand. These constitute considerable limits. School principals stressed the informal influence of parents and the extent to which they attempt to accommodate parent needs and concerns.

4. Strong parent support was indicated for the appropriateness and desirability of an enhanced role for parents in decision-making related to the general area of curriculum and instruction, the selection of school personnel and school financial planning. While many professional educators were not opposed to an enlarged role for parents in personnel selection and financial planning,

strong opposition was expressed to participation or involvement in the area of curriculum and instruction. This decision area is one with a high potential for conflict in the event that an enlarged role for parents was adopted.

5. While principals and teachers were highly satisfied with the current role of parents in the school, parents were equally divided on the question. Parent satisfaction was almost always linked to the progress of their own children and to a perception that school personnel would respond to their needs and concerns. Dissatisfied parents were less confident concerning the responsiveness of school personnel and often objected to what they defined as a lack of opportunity to contribute in important decision areas.

6. Parents were almost evenly divided in their attitude towards parent participation in the operation of the school. No parent offered unqualified support for the concept. Professional educators were strongly opposed to the concept of sharing decision-making authority with parents in the school.

7. Parents were influenced in their attitudes toward parent participation by concerns about the qualifications of parents, about the adequacy of parent representation and by their conception of an ideal parent-professional educator relationship which included limits to appropriate parent participation. Some parents felt also that participation should be achieved only as the final

stage in a developmental process. Professional educators were influenced in their attitudes by their definition of the professional and parent role in the school, by their previous experiences with parent involvement and by their high level of satisfaction with the existing arrangements.

8. Parents varied in their propensity to participate. Individual propensity to participate was related to the perceived relationship between involvement or participation and the educational or personal welfare of their children, to the influence of professional educators, to parents' satisfaction with the school and to such personal attributes as the confidence to act, the level of personal commitments and interest and satisfaction with the existing role opportunities. Some parents, those classified as highly involved, were stimulated towards initial involvement and attempts to participate by particular issues defined as highly relevant to the well-being of their children. It was also found that a parent's experience on a school advisory body led to an increased propensity to participate.

Professional educators related parents' propensity to participate to parents' level of concern for the education of their children, to the influence of professional educators, to parents' satisfaction with the school and to such personal attributes as the parent's confidence to act and individual family commitments and interests.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have implications for school and school-system administrators concerned with optimizing the effectiveness of the school and school system, and for researchers interested in the area of school governance and parent-school relations.

Implications for School and School-System Administrators

The findings of the study raise a number of issues concerned with the role of parents in their children's school and implications for administrators desirous of enhancing the role of parents in their local school.

The appropriateness of the current role of parents. There was substantial agreement between parents and principals and teachers that the current role of parents in the school is largely service and support oriented. Many parents feel underinformed and excluded from key areas of school decision-making and seek an enhanced role in decision areas they define as important. Further, parents perceive that their influence in the school depends to a large extent on the disposition of the school principal and staff and that most of the communication of parent opinion is initiated by parents.

School principals and system administrators might consider the appropriateness of that role and what steps could be taken to modify the role if it was deemed inappropriate. Parents do not seek control of the school.

While a substantial proportion of parents support the concept of a shared decision-making function with professionals, others would value the opportunity to contribute to policy development on a regular and systematic basis. Consideration might also be given to ways in which that could be achieved and ways in which the school might take more of the initiative in the incorporation of parent opinion in school policy development.

Parent desire for an enlarged role. While slightly more than half the parent respondents reported satisfaction with their current role in the school, a substantial proportion of parents, especially those classified as highly involved, reported varying levels of dissatisfaction. Consideration might be given to why this is so and to what steps could be taken to reduce what is a substantial level of dissatisfaction.

The role of the principal and staff. The findings of the study suggest that the school principal and staff play a crucial role in parents' satisfaction with the school, their satisfaction with the existing role opportunities in the school and in the nature of parents' attitudes toward involvement and participation in the school. The findings also suggest the existence of a substantial reservoir of negative attitudes on the part of some professional educators toward parents in the school and to their involvement in other than a service and support capacity. Administrators seeking to foster and facilitate a more influential role for parents would need to be cognizant of the attitude of the principal and staff and take account of those attitudes in the development of strategies.

The opportunity to participate. Common reference was made by teachers to their own limited opportunity to participate in decision-making related to key areas of the operation of the school. The extent to which teachers have the opportunity to participate depends on the disposition of the school principal. While a perceived lack of opportunity to participate was not universal, it is evident that in some schools the influence of teachers may be limited. While the effect of the single-line administrative structure operative in the Edmonton Public School district was not studied, it is possible this has hampered any trend towards a more authoritative role for teachers and that, in turn, has influenced teachers in their attitudes toward an enlarged role for parents in the school. This structure suggests a hierarchical approach to decision-making and emphasizes the decision-making authority and responsibility of individuals within the organization. At the school level, the decision-making authority of the principal is emphasized. More positive teacher attitudes might be dependent upon their assumption of, and experience with, a more authoritative role for themselves.

The formal advisory structure. The findings of the study suggested a relationship between membership of a parent-advisory body and desire to participate in the school. Administrators interested in the gradual assumption of an enhanced role for parents might consider the role of the formal advisory structure in that process. Administrators should also be aware that over time there may be a greater demand for participation status from parents involved in such a body.

The role of an advisory body. Parents and principals and teachers reported that the formal parent-advisory body in their school was currently less effective than should be the case. In one school the tension that had developed between school personnel and parents centered upon the advisory body. Principals and system administrators should consider the cause of such tension and ways to optimize the role of parent-advisory groups in the school. While a clearly-defined role is necessary, it is unlikely to be sufficient. The problem is, rather, how to ensure a viable and satisfying role for parents acting in an advisory capacity. In the school where tension had developed, parents felt their opinion was not highly valued and the school principal and staff were perceived to be unresponsive to parents' needs and concerns.

The importance of role definition. The underlying determinant of parent and professional educator attitudes toward parent participation may be the way in which their respective roles are defined. To achieve successful reform of local school administrative structures may require the adoption of a long-term policy and program designed to modify existing role definitions. As long as parents and professional educators maintain their current respective role definitions there is little likelihood of widespread and on-going parent involvement and participation in the local school. Principals and system administrators interested in long-term change might consider the adoption of policies and strategies which would set that process in motion.

An enhanced role for parents. The findings of the study indicate that many parents are generally satisfied with the existing role of parents in the school and see a more authoritative role for parents as unnecessary or undesirable. In addition, it is clear that an underlying motivation for parents' participation and involvement in their children's school is the well-being of their own children. School system administrators should consider the implications of these findings in relation to any proposal to give a more authoritative role to parents in the administration of their local school.

Implications for Researchers

The findings of the study raise a number of issues that may be of interest to researchers interested in local school governance, the role of parents in schools or the broader area of participation in a democratic society.

1. Certain factors have been described which were related to parents' attitudes toward parent participation and their propensity to participate. Respondents in this sample all occupied a secure and relatively comfortable place in society. Research designed to replicate the study using parents representative of that significant proportion in society whose economic and social position is less favorable is needed to investigate the generalizability of those factors.

2. The findings of the study indicated a relationship between a parent's membership of a school parent-advisory body and their propensity to participate. Further research is required to investigate the existence of that relationship in other educational contexts.

3. Related to the above was the finding indicative of a relationship between the attitudes of teachers toward parent participation in the school and their perceived own opportunity to participate. This relationship could be further investigated in a school district or system where a shared decision-making model between the principal and staff is more firmly established.

4. There is some indication that limited role opportunities, with a service and support bias, are a significant deterrent to many parents' propensity to become more actively involved in the school. The relationship

could be examined more fully by investigating parents' propensity to become actively involved in a school system where parents occupied an authoritative role in local school administration.

5. Parents classified as highly involved were found to differ from the parent sample as a whole in their attitude towards the role of parents in schools and in their own propensity to participate. Some tentative explanations for these differences have been advanced. However, a study focused upon the highly-involved parent would be necessary to further clarify the nature of any differences between these parents and parents in general.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS

Interview Guide: Parents

- Do you feel that the school seeks your opinion about important matters concerning the operation of the school?
- Can you recall issues in which you would have liked to express an opinion, but you were not invited to do so?
- What factors do you feel determine whether the views of parents are, or are not, sought?
- What ways do you have of communicating any views or concerns you might have to the school?
- How well do these ways meet your needs?
- Have you ever become involved in an attempt to influence some decision related to the school? What made you decide to become involved? What ways did you use to become involved? What was the result of your involvement?
- How often do you feel the need to communicate views or concerns to the school?
  Over what types of issues do you tend to become involved?
- How successful do you feel you are in influencing decisions made at the school?
- Are there any areas of school operation in which you would like to be more or less involved?
- Have you ever wanted to become involved in a particular issue and yet decided not to? What things made you decide against it?
- How satisfied are you with the current role of parents in the school?
- What do you feel would be the results of parents being more involved in school decision-making?
- What do you feel discourages parents from becoming more involved in school decision-making? What would encourage parents to become more involved?
- Overall, what is your attitude towards giving parents a greater role in school decision-making? Would you be willing to serve as a parent representative with professionals on a school decision-making body if one was introduced at the school?
- Has membership on the school parent-advisory council influenced your views concerning the role of parents in the school?

APPENDIX B

THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS

Interview Guide: Principals/Teachers

- Is the opinion of parents sought concerning important issues related to the operation of the school?
- What factors do you feel determine whether parents' opinion is sought or not sought?
- What means do parents have for communicating their views or concerns to the school?
- How often do parents use the available means to express views or concerns?
- How well do the existing means meet the needs of parents?
- How influential do you feel that parents are in decisions made relating to the operation of the school?
- How satisfied are you with the current role of parents in the school?
- What causes parents to become involved, or attempt to become involved, in particular issues?
- In what kinds of issues do parents most seek involvement?
- What factors do you feel deter parents from becoming more involved in school decision-making?
- What encourages greater parent involvement in school decision-making?
- Have you had any particular experiences with parent involvement in school decision-making? What were the results of that experience?
- What do you feel would be the results of a greater parent involvement in school decision-making?
- Are there areas of school decision-making more, or less, appropriate for parent involvement than others?
- What is your overall attitude towards the greater involvement of parents in school decision-making?

APPENDIX C

SATISFACTION WITH PARENTS' PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL DECISIONS

Satisfaction with Parents' Participation in School Decisions

		Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	1	5
	Other (n=18)	13	5

		Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	9	1
	Other (n=10)	8	2

APPENDIX D

REPORTED SUPPORT FOR THE CONCEPT OF SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Reported Support for the Concept of Shared Decision-Making

		Support	Non-Support
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	5	1
	Other (n=18)	8	10

		Support	Non-Support
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	3	7
	Other (n=10)	3	7

APPENDIX E

PREFERRED ROLE OF PARENTS IN SELECTED AREAS OF SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING

Preferred Role of Parents in Selected Areas of School Decision-Making

Curriculum-General

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	5	1	0
	Other (n=18)	2	8	8

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	0	3	7
	Other (n=10)	2	6	2

SDM Shared decision-making
ADV Advisory

Preferred Role of Parents in Selected Areas of School Decision-Making

Curriculum and Instruction-Methodological

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	3	3	0
	Other (n=18)	1	8	9

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	0	2	8
	Other (n=10)	0	2	8

SDM Shared decision-making
ADV Advisory

Preferred Role of Parents in Selected Areas of School Decision-Making

Personnel Selection-Principal

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	5	1	0
	Others (n=18)	10	5	3

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	3	4	3
	Other (n=10)	6	2	2

SDM Shared decision-making
ADV Advisory

Preferred Role of Parents in Selected Areas of School Decision-Making

Financial Management

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Parents	Highly Involved (n=6)	5	1	0
	Other (n=18)	7	7	4

		SDM	ADV	NO ROLE
Professional Educators	School with Formal Advisory Structure (n=10)	4	5	1
	Other (n=18)	3	6	1

SDM Shared decision-making
ADV Advisory